

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

Issued Semi-Monthly—By Subscription \$1.25 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York, N. Y., Post Office, January 12, 1898, by Frank Tousey.

No. 9.

NEW YORK, May 4, 1898.

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Hurrying forward, with feverish excitement, they soon came near enough to make out the real character of this singular looking object. It was the body of a man, frozen solid, and covered with snow and ice, standing as firmly as though carved from stone.



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NORTH POLE NAT:

— OR —

THE SECRET OF THE FROZEN DEEP.

BY CAPT. THOS. H. WILSON.

CHAPTER I.

THE WHALER—A WELCOME HAIL—THE CONSPIRATORS—THE CHASE.

"THERE she blows!"

The cry came from the mast-head of an American whaling bark, cruising in the Arctic ocean, late in September of the year 1869, in latitude 79 degrees and 26 minutes N., longitude 71 degrees and 22 minutes W., or about the middle of Smith's Sound.

The bark was the Arctic Fox, James Hathaway master, of New York, and had remained rather late in the season, owing to Captain Hathaway's desire to make a good catch.

Many of the crew had demurred to this, being afraid of having to remain in the ice during the long Arctic winter, which is invariably severe.

The captain was determined, however, and there was no disputing him when he made up his mind to do anything.

Had he listened to reason he would still be alive and well, in all probability, and his crew would have been spared a vast deal of privation and death.

In that event, however, this story might never have been written, or the strange events which it depicts, never have happened.

To return to the bark, however, and the seamen aboard of her.

At the well-known hail, one which the men had been anxiously waiting to hear for many days, every sailor, awake or asleep, sprang to his feet.

Every whaleman knows the magic there is in that sound, changing idle, listless beings into nervous, excited creatures, every fibre of their systems throbbing with enthusiasm, every sense alert, every muscle strained to its utmost.

"Where away?" sang out the captain in a ringing voice which could be heard in every part of the ship.

"Almost straight ahead, sir."

"Who's that up aloft?" asked the mate, Mr. Cartwright.

"Job Hawkins, sir," answered a lad of about twenty, tall, well-built, and muscular.

This was Nathan Evans, commonly called Nat, the hero of our story.

"If Job Hawkins says he sees anything, you can rely upon it," said the mate. "He has the sharpest eyes in the whole fleet, and a better harpooner never lived."

"How far off are they, Job?" called out the captain.

"About six miles, sir."

"Regular Greenlanders, are they?"

"Ay, ay, sir! I don't see but one of 'em, but he's big. Got two spouts to him as thick as my arm, travelin' putty fast, too. There he blows, agin, sir!"

"We'll have him, if there is only one," murmured the captain. "He'll make over a hundred barrels, more'n likely, to say nothing of the bone."

Nat scrambled in the forerigging in order to get a good sight of the monster, just as the captain called out again:

"Sure there's only one, Job?"

"That's all, sir."

"There she blows!" yelled Nat, on the instant, "there's two of them."

"Hallo, North Pole Nat has got something to say about it," muttered Mr. Cartwright, "he's always sticking in his oar."

Nat was forever talking about the North Pole, his father having been lost on an exploring expedition thither, and Cartwright had nicknamed him North Pole Nat, the title sticking to him, as such things will.

As Nat sung out, the sailors looked aloft, and one or two of them laughed, though these were not the friends of the young fellow.

A handsome young cabin-boy, probably about sixteen years of age, and looking remarkably effeminate for a youth, though he was as bright and smart as any boy, gazed with admiring looks at Nat, perched away up aloft, and said in a low tone:

"He may have as good eyes as you have, Mr. Mate, and know as much for all your poking fun at him."

"Can you make out two of them, Job?" asked the captain.

"Yes, sir, I can now. Nat was right about that. T'other one has just come up."

"Do you see more than two, Nat?"

"No, sir, and mine is not as big as Job's."

"They're heading for the drift in, sir," shouted Job, from his exalted perch in the "crow's nest," as the lookout is called upon a whaler.

"Come down from aloft; shipkeeper, get your signals ready, clear away the boats there, get in your line tubs."

Job and Nat ran down the rigging like monkeys, the sailors hurried to and fro, and a scene of great excitement and bustle ensued.

The boat-steerers, or harpooners, looked after their "craft," as the harpoons, lances, and other implements used against whales are called, the tub-oarsmen put the tubs containing the lines into the boats, amidships, while others cleared the falls from the davits, so as to be ready to hoist the boats from the cranes when the proper order should be given.

In southern latitudes it is customary for whalemens to divest themselves of all superfluous clothing when getting ready to chase whales, but here the case was quite different.

The weather was cold and piercing, the men at the wheel and aloft having to protect their hands with fur mittens, and everybody aboard was dressed in furs, fitting quite tight, so as to allow free play of the muscles.

The time when whalers usually returned had long passed, and

the quantity of drift ice to be met with was something alarming, an occasional iceberg being also seen in the distance.

Even now, the spray dashed up by the cutwater of the Arctic Fox was frozen as it fell upon the bowsprit, stays, and lower guys, and the martingale was one mass of ice.

The wind whistled through the rigging and cut like a knife if one exposed his face to it for any length of time, and the only way to keep warm was by constant exertion.

The days were already beginning to grow very short, and before another month would cease altogether.

No wonder then that the men grumbled; and they were ripe for mutiny, which was only quelled by the firmness of the captain.

Mr. Cartwright and Mr. Jones, the first and second mates, were among the malcontents, and nearly half the seamen were under their control, Job Hawkins and Nat remaining true to the captain.

"When we get this fellow boiled down," muttered the mate to his fellow conspirator, "we start for home, or I must know the reason why. You don't catch me staying here any longer."

"Why not refuse to go after him at all?"

"No, no, that won't do; we must seem to obey, but——"

The sentence was completed in the man's ear, and no one else heard it.

"All right then, that will do, first rate."

"All ready there?" sang out the captain.

"Ay, ay, sir."

"I'm going to take my bomb-gun, Joe," said the master. "Don't lower away till I come back," diving down into his cabin as he spoke.

A bomb-gun is a very large, bare weapon used for shooting the bomb lances into a whale's side, the barrel being more than an inch in diameter, inside measurement.

The bombs are sharp and winged like an arrow, and when they pierce any substance a hammer is tripped which explodes a cartridge, and gives the huge cetaceans a bad and generally fatal wound.

Captain Hathaway soon returned with his gun and a box of bombs, nearly a foot in length, which he deposited in the stern sheets.

"Hoist and swing," was the order; the boats were lifted from the cranes, the latter swung inboard, and the men at the falls stood ready for the next order.

"Lanier!"

The ropes flew through the blocks, the men scrambled into the boats, each in his place, the oars were run out and away pulled the sailors, many looking upon the Arctic Fox for the last time.

CHAPTER II.

AN EXCITING CHASE—FAST TO A WHALE.

THE whaling bark carried four boats, manned respectively by the captain and three mates, each officer having a harpooner and four seamen, making six men to a boat.

Aboard the vessel were the shipkeeper and his crew, consisting of the cook, steward, carpenter, cooper, blacksmith, and one or two extra hands.

The shipkeeper signaled to the boats the movements of the whales, whether they were up or down, which way they went, whether they had disappeared for good, when to return to the ship, and everything else that was necessary to know.

He commanded the vessel in the captain's absence, and the men under him were obliged to obey him in all particulars, as though he had been the captain himself.

The boats went dancing over the waves, their sails set and the men pulling besides, while the signal flag, flying aloft, indicated that the whales were still in sight, and unmindful of the presence of enemies.

The cook was at the wheel, and kept the vessel's head as it had been, for that told which direction the cetaceans were taking, and saved the boat headers much unnecessary trouble, as often the sea runs so high that things near at hand are hidden, and therefore a glance backward at the vessel is the easiest way to tell what is going on.

The two whales were still seemingly unconscious of the approach of their enemies, and were blowing and playing in the water, lashing the icy waves into foam, and leaving a greasy wake, or "sleek," as sailors call it, behind them.

The wind blew fresh and strong, and after a while the men unshipped their oars, so as to make as little noise as possible.

The shipkeeper, Ed Lewis by name, a raw-boned, big-chested Nantucket man, had, in his hurry, left his glass below, and looking down, he called out:

"Below there! Tell Frank to bring up my glass."

"He isn't here, sir," answered the carpenter.

"Where is he?"

"Gone in the old man's boat, I reckon."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, sir, if he was here, we'd 've seen him before this, for he's a lively lad."

"Confound the young scamp," muttered the man to himself.

"Why the blazes couldn't he stay aboard, I'd like to know?"

Frank Trafton, the cabin boy already alluded to, had indeed gone after the whales, taking a seat by the side of the captain, and occasionally assisting him in steering, for the harpooner never goes aft until after the whale has been struck, his superior doing the killing, and he the steering after that.

Frank was a general favorite on board, and upon that account the captain had made no objection when he found the lad at his side, but merely smiled and patted his curly head.

In the captain's boat, besides himself and Frank, were Job Hawkins, who pulled the harpooner's oar; Nat Evans, stroke; Jim Brown, tub; a rotund specimen of humanity called Chucks, 'midship, and a brawny Yankee by the name of Sol Sampson, bow.

The boat was ahead of the three others, the mate's coming next in order, and every man was in a fever of excitement, which increased as the distance between them and the whales momentarily lessened.

The latter was keeping a pretty steady course, but not being aware of the approach of the boats, did not go as fast as the latter, so that the captain gained upon them every minute.

It was a pretty even thing, however, after all, for the boats were still three or four miles behind, and no one could tell at what moment the whales might become frightened, "galled," the sailors called it, and either go down, or start off at such a rate that it would be hard to follow them.

The men sat idly upon the thwarts, talking in low tones, the captain steering and Frank tending the sheet of the sail, easing off occasionally and then drawing it a little flatter, as the breeze freshened.

Two hours passed, and the boats were still a mile or so behind, at least the captain's boat was, the others having fallen considerably to the rear.

The distance lessened, and presently the captain ordered the men to take in sail, unstep the mast and get out their paddles, which made less noise than oars.

The orders were obeyed, and soon the paddles were dipped deep and with an even stroke in the water, the boat gliding over the sea at a fair rate of speed.

By some mischance, Chucks struck the shaft of his paddle against the gunwale and made considerable noise, which the whales heard, gifted as they are with an acute sense of hearing.

They took the alarm immediately and were off like a shot, going right away from their pursuers.

"Get out oars, bullies," said the captain, "pull away, my tars, now then! Give 'em a good, long, steady stroke, Nat, and we'll overhaul these greasers yet."

The men pulled with a will, and at the end of another hour the whales seemed to have recovered from their fright and were not going as fast as before.

"I'm glad they didn't sound, anyhow," said the captain, "for there's no knowing where they might not have come up, or whether they would do so at all."

"The bark don't seem to keep up with us, as well as she did," said Frank. "She's fallen behind considerable."

"So she has, replied the captain, glancing back over his shoulder. "Never mind, she'll have a chance when we get fast to this fellow."

Half an hour later, the boat had drawn so near that Job took in his oar, stood up and got his harpoon ready.

"Pull easy, my boys," whispered the captain, "steady and easy, and don't make any more noise than you can help."

"Put me off, a bit, sir," said Job, putting his knee in the chock and poising his weapon. "I want to hit him abaft the hump, and I'm a little afraid of his flukes."

The whale was an immense fellow, being over one hundred feet in

length and of a dark gray, mottled with brown, promising from his looks to yield a good supply of oil and bone.

He had every appearance, too, of being a troublesome fellow, and without doubt would give the whalers a hard job to subdue him.

His monstrous flukes beat the water and churned it into foam, the twin columns of vapor and water shooting up every now and then from the spout holes, as he would sink a few feet and then arise, a decidedly "fishy" odor being perceptible, although, properly speaking, a whale is not a fish, but a marine animal.

The captain put the boat off a little so as to allow it to pass the flukes or tail of the monster, and then when about midway of the creature's length headed directly toward him.

Job now poised his harpoon, braced himself firmly, took a good aim, and calculating the distance carefully, made a good three fathom dart, driving the harpoon deep into the monster's side, just back of the hump, the very best place in the world for it.

"Stern, stern!" yelled the captain, thinking that the whale would turn upon him.

The men backed water, and the life ran out as the whale dashed ahead, lashing his flukes, and uttering a kind of snort as he felt the sharp barbs of the harpoon piercing his sides.

The thrust had been a good one, and a stream of blood dyed the waters crimson, but, in spite of this, the animal kept on increasing his speed as he went ahead.

The smaller whale had sounded when the bigger one was struck, and at that time was nowhere to be seen.

"Pull ahead, bullies!" said the captain, taking a turn around the loggerhead with the line, so as not to let it run out too fast.

"Shouldn't wonder if I could give him another dart, sir," spoke up Job. "He's a big fellow, and the fust iron might pull out."

"All right, Job, get your other harpoon ready, and I'll put you on him in a minute. Pull ahead, bullies! How do you like this kind of sport, Frank?"—turning to the lad at his side.

"First rate, sir; it's very exciting, and I shouldn't wonder if it was dangerous as well."

"You're right, there, my lad, it is dangerous sometimes, and no mistake. Keep a good stroke, Nat, and never mind the whale. He can't hurt us, for we're out o' the way of his flukes."

"Put me a little nearer now, sir, and I'll sock it to him again," remarks Job, poising his second harpoon, there being three in the boat.

"All right," answers Captain Hathaway; and as Job comes within good distance once more, the slack of the line having been taken around the loggerhead, he makes a second dart, sending the harpoon further forward than the first, but in a good place nevertheless.

The whale makes a bound as the second iron enters, and the line plays out rapidly, the captain not caring to get a slap of those flukes, which would stave his boat to bits in a moment.

As the whale did not sound, the captain took a turn around the bit again, and let the greasy fellow tow him, the men having already shipped their oars, the speed being too fast to make them of any use.

"Light your pipes, boys," said the master, jocosely. "We'll let this fellow tire himself out, and then we'll run up and lance him. I'll signal the other boat to come down."

Little did he expect that he would never see them again, or that his life-current had nearly run out.

CHAPTER III.

AN UNEXPECTED CATASTROPHE—OVERTAKEN BY NIGHT—A DREADFUL ANNOUNCEMENT.

Affairs now became more exciting than ever, for the boat was being towed through the seething waters at a rate of not less than seven knots, the sea bubbling all around them, and a gleaming wake trailing out behind.

Then, too, the drift ice became thicker, and it was a matter of considerable skill to steer clear of some of the larger masses, a contact with which would have been the destruction of the boat.

The captain had brought his glass with him, and after being towed for fully half an hour, he got it out from beneath the stern sheets, and gazed long and earnestly ahead of him.

"I don't like the looks of that ice," he muttered; "it seems to be packing in towards shore, and right across the channel, too. It's likely that it'll do the same behind us as well."

Frank Trafton, who had turned around and was looking astern of him, suddenly cried out at this juncture in startling tones:

"I can't see the boats anywhere, sir, for the life of me. Nor the ship, either," he added, in the next breath.

The captain turned about and swept the horizon with his glass.

"My God! She is nowhere to be seen," he gasped. "Do you see this fog that is settling down all around us? It hides her from sight."

"'Taint a fog at all," mutters Joe, still seated forward, "but a regular cloud-bank; and if it don't mean snow, and lots of it, then I'm mistaken."

"Is he going just as fast, Joe?" asked the captain.

"Ay, ay, sir, every bit; no, he's slackin' up some; guess we can haul in upon him."

"Take in slack, boys; lively now," orders the captain, and the tub-oarsman coils it down in the tub as it comes in, length by length.

The boat drew up considerably upon the monster, and Captain Hathaway determined to try and kill him at once.

They had been out now for at least six hours, and night was not more than an hour distant. With the increased darkness around them, it might be less time than that before they would be unable to see anything.

"Come aft, Job, and I'll see if I can stop his nonsense."

Job went aft and took the steering oar, while the captain, armed with a long and exceedingly sharp lance made of the finest steel, took his place in the bow.

The men dipped their oars and pulled lustily, the captain being alongside in a few minutes, his arm raised for the blow.

Deep into the animal's side he plunged the lance, pulling it out and thrusting it in again and again, fairly churning the whale with it, and causing the blood to gush out in a crimson stream.

The animal, although mortally wounded, made a dive for the boat, and the men were obliged to back water immediately.

The line slacked, and the captain got his foot in a bight of it unwittingly.

The whale suddenly changed his tactics, the line tightened and ran out rapidly, the loop about the captain's leg drawing up in an instant, and before he could cry out or release himself he was dragged overboard into the boiling sea.

Job uttered a cry of horror, and seizing the hatchet, which is always ready for such emergencies, cut the line.

He was too late, however, for the unfortunate skipper had been drawn down below the surface, and was nowhere to be seen.

He did not come up again, and in all probability he had been rendered unconscious by the fierce rush of waters, and no doubt dead long before that time.

"There goes the whale," said Nat, "blowing like fury. I guess he don't feel sorry, for a cent."

"We must pick up the captain," said Job, "and then go back to the ship. Blamed lucky if we don't get caught in a plaguy snow squall afore we git back," he muttered in a half audible aside.

They waited around the spot for nearly an hour, and saw no trace of the captain, finally coming to the conclusion that he had not been disentangled from the rope, and that in all likelihood the whale was still towing him through the water, as probable a conclusion as any which they could arrive at.

"Then we'd better go back," remarked Joe, when this conclusion was reached.

"Easier said than done, my brave man! There is no going back now, no matter how hard you try!"

As he spoke there came a sharp blast which cut to the bone, and in an instant the huge snowflakes were whirling around them in a blinding mass.

Job, turning to shield himself, slipped and fell into the bottom of the boat, losing his hold upon the steering oar, which floated away out of sight in an instant.

The storm was so fierce that the men could not see where they were going, or even pull their oars, the only thing to be done being to sit still until it subsided.

The captain's great coat was under the stern thwart, and Nat got it out and made Frank wrap himself up in it, for the boy, more delicate than the rest, was beginning to feel the cold and shivered like a leaf.

"I'll be blamed if this ain't too pesky for anything," growled Job. "Bet a cent the current's taking us north as fast as it can go. It's all

on account o' you, Nat, and we're bound to reach the North Pole, sure pop."

The snow fell as thickly as ever, and continued to do so for an hour, by which time it was quite dark, the snow still falling, though not so fast as before.

"We might as well have a light, anyhow," was the sudden remark of Job, nobody having said a word for ten minutes. "Get out the lantern, Nat."

Every whale-boat carries, when in pursuit of whales, a boat lantern, which is put in a keg made expressly for it, and Nat now got this out, and, shielding it from the wind, struck a light and ignited the wick.

The lantern was then put in the line-tub, the attempts to step the mast and hoist it to the top thereof having been abandoned after two or three trials.

"There's no use in trying to get home to-night," muttered Job (every sailor speaks of his ship as "home") "and I don't see why we can't be comfortable. We've got some grub, so let's eat it, and then talk about something else."

Before starting out the men had put in a keg of fresh water, another of hard-tack, and a considerable quantity of pemmican, or pressed meat, the latter being used a great deal by Arctic sailors from its combining the greatest quantity of nutriment in the smallest bulk.

The crew at once followed Job's suggestion, and made a hearty meal, after which the harpooner and Chucks lit their pipes (no whale-man is ever without his pipe and tobacco) and enjoyed the luxury of a smoke.

"Won't you have a whiff, Frank?" asked Job, with a laugh.

"No, I thank you."

"Perhaps you'd like a chew? I can accommodate you with either."

"Not to-night, Job," answered Frank, from the shaggy depths of the captain's great coat.

"You'll never make a man if you don't use tobacco," laughed Job, puffing a great cloud of smoke out into the snowflakes.

"I'll never be any more a man than I am now, I guess, tobacco or no tobacco. Wonder if I'd better go to sleep?"

"Do you feel cold?" asked Nat.

"Not a bit."

"Nor drowsy, either?"

"No; but I suppose we shall be here all night, and that's why I spoke of going to sleep."

"You're all right," answered Job, with a snort. "You don't know why North Pole Nat asked you those two questions, do you?"

"For information, I presume."

"Exactly, and if your information had been different he wouldn't let you go to sleep for a fortune."

"Why not?"

"'Cause if he had, you'd 've frozen to death afore mornin', just as sure as my name is Job Hawkins!"

"Frozen to death!" exclaimed Frank, in surprise.

"Yes," answered Nat. "There's no danger now, however, and if you like, you can roll yourself up in your big coat, cover your face, and drop off to sleep, and the thicker the snow falls on you the warmer you'll be. Keep the snow off your face, that's all, and you're safe enough."

"I shouldn't wonder if Jim Brown and Sol had already gone to sleep," said Frank, ten minutes or so later, the snow still falling steadily, the cold increasing considerably, notwithstanding, "for I haven't heard anything of them for half an hour."

"Pass me the lantern," said Job, without further comment, and Frank did as requested.

The harpooner held the light close to the faces of the two men, and gave a grunt of surprise.

"H'm, they be asleep, sure enough, but it's a sleep that they won't wake from in this world."

"What do you mean?" said Frank, springing up.

Nat understood Job's meaning only too well.

"He means," said he, "that the men have been frozen to death!"

CHAPTER IV.

AFLOAT ON THE ICE—THE BEARS.

"FROZEN to death!" repeated Frank. "Right here before our very eyes!"

"Yes, my lad, right here in the midst of us. I never expected such

a thing would happen to Jim Brown, nor Sol neither, 'cause both of 'em's been here before and knows the ropes."

"But I don't feel very cold!"

"That's cause you've got on the old man's coat, and 'cause you're young and full of vitality. These fellows were older and half pickled with rum."

"I ain't any chicken, Mister Job," said Chucks, "and I ben't cold."

"You! Why bless your old rosy chops, you're too fat to freeze. If we run out of grub, we can boil you down and live on the oil for a month."

There was a laugh at this remark, but Nat said, gravely:

"Don't, Job, the matter is too serious to jest about. Men have been compelled before now to live upon their fellow beings, but I trust that we shall never be reduced to such straits."

"I was only joking, Master Nat, and I didn't mean anything, I'd be the last one to resort to such a means of keeping alive."

"I believe you would, sir, but doesn't it strike you that the snow is letting up somewhat?"

"It is, indeed," interrupted Chucks, "but the cold isn't. Golly! what's that cracking sound?"

"The ice is forming around us, that's what it means." This from Job, who instantly seized an oar and worked it vigorously about in the icy water.

"Suppose we all take our oars and pull," said Nat, suiting the action to the word, the rest, Frank included, following his example.

Nothing could be seen, so dark was the night, but they all pulled with a will, and kept the ice from gathering too thickly around them, the exertion arousing their pulses and making them glow from the heat still within their bodies.

The snow presently ceased to fall, except very gently, but the wind increased in sharpness and made their faces tingle, so that they were obliged to rub them occasionally to prevent their noses and cheeks from freezing.

Their fur suits were provided with hoods, which they could draw up over the tops of their heads down to their eyebrows, and button up around their chins, a small portion only of their faces being left uncovered.

They had all protected themselves in this way, their hands being encased in heavy fur mittens which, while they allowed only a certain degree of freedom, protected them from cold most effectually.

The lantern gave them some light, to be sure, but not enough to enable them to distinguish objects at a distance, and this was quite necessary, considering the fact that they were speeding along very rapidly.

Several times Frank, who now sat in the stern sheets, Nat having insisted that he should do no more rowing, warned them against blocks of floating ice, to strike upon which would have caused them serious injury.

Keeping a good lookout, he gave orders to pull, now this way, now that, and many times averted a catastrophe by his watchfulness, the others, sitting with their backs turned to the bow, being unable to see their danger.

The boat was provided with a rudder, which could be unshipped when not wanted, and this was now hung, Frank holding the tiller ropes and guiding the boat aright.

Another hour passed, and now the ice began to form so thickly that the men's exertions became tiresome in the extreme, and the perspiration stood upon their foreheads in great beads.

The oar blades were double their normal size with ice, and the shafts bent under its weight, making it necessary for Frank to take the hatchet and knock it off every few minutes.

The rudder, too, being slight, became clogged before long, and upon Frank's giving it a quicker motion than ordinary, on account of a large mass of ice against which they were drifting, it broke in two and was rendered utterly useless.

"Wonder how long the night lasts up here?" said Chucks. "Seems to me it never ends."

"In less than six weeks it will set in to last three months," remarked Nat, "but at this time we have several hours of day-light, though the further North we go the less there is, until we get away up to the Pole, and there I suppose it's all night one half the year and all day the other, though I don't know exactly."

"Who do you suppose is going up there to find out?" asked the ro-tund Chucks, with a grin.

"I am, if I can ever get there."

"Look out!" shouted Frank, suddenly, in great excitement. "We are drifting into something!"

Nat turned his head and saw a great white mass towering above his head, and extending directly across their path for many yards.

He was about to sheer off when the boat suddenly glided up several feet upon this object, and then struck with a sharp, grating sound.

"We've struck on an iceberg!"

"The boat is stove to bits!"

"The water is rushing in like a mill-stream!"

These cries were uttered almost simultaneously, and all four of the occupants made a hasty scramble upon the iceberg, the boat, though badly shattered, remaining fast.

When safely landed they hauled the boat up still further and began to look about them.

Around the outer edges of the berg was a sort of level path many feet in width, while in the center it arose to a considerable height and was of most fantastic shape, looking like a huge night cap, with a peaked and tasseled top.

"Tain't a night-cap," remarked Chucks. "It's an extinguisher, and it's put us out already."

"Yes, out on the ice," responded Job, quickly. "This is a pretty how-do-you-do."

"Jim Brown and Sol have been washed overboard," said Nat, suddenly. "The line tub is all right, though, and the other harpoon."

"Then I'm going for that," said Job, "for there's no knowing when we may need it."

He secured his harpoon, together with the warp attached to it, and a couple of fathoms of line, and thus provided he was ready for anything.

Chucks got the bomb-gun and box of bombs, depositing them upon the ice, while Nat and Frank were provided respectively with the spy-glass and hatchet, all having sheath-knives, of course.

As the boat was so badly smashed that it would be of no use for navigation, everything in it was removed and landed on the ice, after which it was broken up and the fragments piled together, to be used as firewood whenever they should need it.

The mast, sail and oars—there being only three good ones, however, the others having been broken—were put aside carefully, as there was no telling when they might be needed.

"We are drifting rapidly," said Nat, after all these preparations had been made, and he had a chance to look about him.

"Well, being on an iceberg isn't as good as sailing in a boat," rejoined Job, "but it's a blamed sight better than getting chucked into the icy water around us."

"I'm getting cold," said Frank; "this wind cuts like a knife; can't we rig up some shelter or other? There's the sail—that'll keep it off."

Nat and Job acted upon this suggestion at once, and cutting holes in the ice, they planted a couple of oars firmly, wedging them in with loose blocks, and spreading the sail between them.

This kept the wind off most effectually, and Frank had no more cause for complaint, but sitting on the line-tub, chatted merrily with the others.

None of them dared to go to sleep, and as it was necessary to keep up a certain amount of exertion, they amused themselves by walking up and down and lashing their sides with their arms, not because they were cold, but to keep up a good circulation.

At length, as all things have an end, the morning dawned, suddenly, as it always does in high latitudes, and the party was able to get a better look of their surroundings than they had previously done.

The berg seemed to be several hundred feet in extent, and about five hundred feet above the water at its extreme height.

All hands set out to walk around it, and they had gone about a hundred yards when, as they turned a sharp corner, Job uttered an exclamation of surprise and pointed ahead of them.

They all looked, and saw two immense Polar bears glaring savagely at them!

"We'll see about that," answered Chucks, who had brought his big-bore fowling piece with him. "I shouldn't mind a nice fat Polar-bear steak for breakfast a cent's worth."

"What are you going to do?" asked Job, quickly.

"Plug that barefooted cuss with the white coat what's grinning at me right through the pulpitator!"

"The what?" said Nat, with a laugh.

"The heart, to be sure."

"Why do you call him barefooted?" asked Frank.

"Because, being a bear and having feet, he must naturally be barefooted."

"And that's the most barefaced attempt at a poor joke that I ever saw in my life," rejoined Nat, laughing heartily, as the round, rosy Chucks waddled toward the two animals, still standing there and glaring defiantly upon the little party.

"Be careful, old fat-sides," said Job, coming to his aid with the harpoon, "them fellers can fight like the very mischief when they get riled, so look out for yourself."

"You take one and I'll take t'other. I'll go for the right and you for the left. Come ahead."

It was by no means an easy task to attack two monstrous white bears, but the very daring of the thing proved its safety, and it is more than likely that if the two men had shown the least sign of fear, the two bears would have pursued and torn them to pieces.

Their determined advance puzzled the huge creatures exceedingly, and they remained motionless until the rotund Chucks was within a few feet of them, when, with a growl, the foremost animal made a rush.

The heavy brass gun was at the shoulder of Chucks in an instant, there was a loud report, a vivid flash, and the winged bomb with its sharp point sped swiftly upon its fatal errand.

It pierced the huge animal's side and then exploded, causing a terrible wound, actually tearing open the creature's side and letting out his life in a few moments.

The recoil of the gun had been greater than Chucks had expected, and he fell over upon his back in a bank of snow.

The other bear made a savage rush upon him, and, but for Job, it would have fared hardly with the jolly fellow.

Job was right there, however, and, bracing himself firmly, jabbed his formidable weapon up to the very pole in the creature's side, piercing the heart and coming out on the other side.

The bear rolled over, carrying the harpoon with him; but death had been instantaneous, and there were no struggles whatever.

Nat and Frank now ran up, and gazed with wonder upon the two huge beasts slain by their comrades, each weighing at least five hundred pounds.

"Golly! that was a close shave," said Chucks, scrambling out of the snow and shaking the icy particles from him. "I didn't suppose the thing was going to cut up like that and go back on a feller. It's a double-barreled shame!"

"You're wrong, it has only one," retorted Nat. "Don't abuse it for doing its duty. That was a fine shot."

"I should remark that it was! If one of them bombs can play the deuce with a whale, it isn't to be expected that a Polar bear is going to be of much use after it's gone into him—no, sir!"

"We want this oil," said Nat, "and after making our breakfast, we had better try out these fellows and save it."

The animals were cut up, the hides being first removed, and then a fire was made, and the pieces put on sharp sticks set into the ice.

Under the pieces the spare kegs and boat-buckets were placed, the oil running into them as fast as it oozed out—a primitive way of trying it, to be sure, but the best at hand.

As not a quarter of the immense carcasses could be thus utilized, there being an insufficient number of utensils to contain the oil, much had to be thrown aside, but as it was frozen solid in a few moments, it could be easily thawed out and used when occasion required.

The party next climbed half way to the top of the berg, taking a considerable length of rope with them to assist them in climbing, passing it around their bodies and leaving a slack between each one of them.

From the summit they beheld a perfect picture of desolation, not a sign of life being visible in any direction.

On all sides stretched a frozen sea, a narrow channel in the center being the only thing to break the monotony of the white surface.

CHAPTER V.

THE MARCH ACROSS THE ICE—A CURIOUS DISCOVERY.

"HALLO! We've got company with us!" said Job, upon seeing the bears, "and as they're the first comers, I suppose they think they've got the best right to the place."

Away to the northeast were some snow-covered peaks which might be land or icebergs, while to the north there appeared nothing but leaden skies, floating ice and inky waters.

The air was cold and searching, and they could see that new ice was constantly forming, the floes packing and wedging in towards what seemed to be the land, and before long, they doubted not, the whole surface of the water would be covered with an icy barrier and their further progress stopped.

After viewing this scene of desolation, the awful silence oppressing their senses with unutterable gloom, they descended to the level once more, particularly as the snow began to fall again very heavily.

With great difficulty they made their way back to the camp, and getting under the lee of an icy bluff, as it might be called, rolled themselves up in the sail and went to sleep, covering their hands and faces carefully.

The snow drifted over their bodies, but this was an added protection from the cold, and so long as they were not buried too deeply, they were safe enough.

When Nat awoke, after what seemed a long sleep, and indeed it was, it was dark overhead and the snow had ceased falling, though the sky was still thickly overcast.

Crawling out from under Lis shelter, he shook the snow away from him, having poked his head up through it, and looked about him.

Presently Frank awoke and then the others, and as they were all rather hungry, they attacked the pemmican and hard-tack, washing them down with water from the kegs, or rather with lumps of ice put in their mouths, for the water, having been exposed the day before, was frozen solid.

Then they lit a fire, more for company than anything else, and sat around it, telling yarns and cracking jokes, everyone being in the best of spirits, for they still hoped to meet some vessel, either their own or another, which would take them home.

Not one suspected that they were destined to spend the long winter amid the ice and the dreary solitudes of the polar regions, but such was the lot ordained to them.

Neither did they know that those aboard the Arctic Fox had not only no intention of seeking them, but, on the contrary, had in fact abandoned them to their fate, only to meet a worse one themselves.

Consequently, they were high-spirited and cheery, not the slightest misgiving entering their minds, and it was well that it was so, and that a knowledge of their probable fate was not suddenly forced upon them.

All that night they drifted along, and all the next day, and it was not until night fell once more that they began to fear that there was no help for them.

On the morning of the third day since landing upon the berg, Nat aroused his companions, and started out to make a further exploration.

Frank suddenly uttered an exclamation of intense surprise.

"We are no longer moving," he said.

This was apparent in a moment, and a short walk opened their eyes still further.

The conical peak of their icy craft had been broken off at least a hundred feet and the huge blocks lay all around them, covered with snow, while on all sides stretched away a limitless expanse of solid ice.

They were alone upon the frozen deep, with no hope of rescue!

"Let us push on," said Nat; "we cannot stay here and we may find a shelter."

Making a sort of sledge of the ribs of their boat which still remained, covering it with the sail and depositing their supplies thereon, they hitched ropes to it and dragged it behind them over the snow.

All day long they proceeded, going due north, all whale boats being provided with compasses, and theirs having been carefully saved, so that they could now consult it, encamping by night under a bluff and setting out once more at daybreak.

On the sixth day after their departure from the ship, as they were proceeding as usual, they climbed a steep ascent and suddenly came upon a most remarkable sight.

This was no less than the dismayed hull of a ship, standing bolt upright and covered thickly with snow and ice, which revealed only its form, the planks being sheathed with ice.

The jib-boom was broken short off, but standing upon the bowsprit,

between the knight-heads, was some object which was not at first recognizable.

Hurrying forward with feverish excitement, they soon came near enough to make out the real character of this singular looking object.

It was the body of a man, frozen solid, and covered with snow and ice, standing as firmly as though carved from stone.

His feet were set closely together, but the hands were raised and held a spy-glass to his sightless eyes.

The whole was one mass of ice, but the outlines were perfect, and even the fur mittens, hood and high boots could be distinguished.

The man had evidently been caught in the ice, and while trying to see his way out had been frozen to death as he stood, and remaining there, no one could tell how long.

The four castaways gazed long and in deep silence upon this sad memento of man's weakness, when Nat broke the spell by exclaiming:

"Let us go aboard and unravel this SECRET OF THE FROZEN DEEP!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE SECRET ASSUMES COMPLICATIONS—NAT CHOSEN CAPTAIN.

WITH hasty steps the four companions approached the solitary ship, and looked about them for a means of ascending. Upon one side, near the quarter, there was a mound of ice, from which to the deck a natural bridge had been formed, and across this they soon made their way, standing at last where never a human foot had trod for many years. The snow lay thick upon the deck, and the stumps of masts were masses of snow-covered ice, looking like sheeted specters keeping guard over the secrets of the lonely ship. The hatches were closed and sealed hermetically by that icy hand, whose presence could be felt everywhere about; but the cabin door was partly open, the snow having drifted in a great white heap down the companionway. How long the ship had remained here no one could tell, nor how many years that ghastly sentinel upon the prow, gazing with those sightless orbs into the mist and snow of this desolate region.

Nat and his comrades walked forward, their footsteps creaking upon the crisp snow, the freezing wind howling about them and the pitiless sky frowning down upon them, with its ever leaden hue hanging like a gray pall over their heads. Not a sound broke the awful stillness, and the very silence seemed to be an argument against its being broken, but Nat, nevertheless, dispelled the gloom by saying cheerily:

"Don't be down-hearted, boys. There's no reason why we should be frozen up, if this poor fellow has been. I propose to make this hull our home, and who knows but what we may find provisions and the means of making ourselves comfortable aboard? Let us search the old hulk by all means. Come on! Follow me!"

"I believe you're right," spoke up Chucks. "I am sorry for that poor fellow there, but we needn't get down in the mouth on that account."

Nat had reached the cabin door by this time, the ship being provided with a sort of quarter deck, and he at once laid hold of the door to force it open.

The ice and snow held it firmly, however, and it had to be demolished with the hatchet before they could make a place wide enough to pass through.

There was a flight of half a dozen steps before them, and down they walked, Nat and Frank clearing away the ice upon them so that there would be no danger in slipping. In spite of this caution, Chucks slipped, and landing upon his rear with a thud, slid down the steps and half way across the outer cabin, bringing up against the bulkhead with a force that nearly stood him up straight again.

"Golly!" he ejaculated, when he recovered his breath, that expletive being a favorite one with him; "that was a bouncer, and no mistake. If it had been you that slipped down, Job, you'd 'nd broken in two."

"You're right, old porpoise, but I'm not so clumsy as you, and don't go sliding around wherever I am."

The cabin appeared to be a commodious one, containing several sitting and state-rooms, and was fitted up with every convenience, several nautical instruments being observed upon the walls and laid away in lockers. Casting merely a cursory glance around the place, looking

through the doors and observing the general disposition of the room, the party passed through a door in the bulkhead, and so on through the steerage, with its commodious storerooms on either side, thence to the men's quarters. The fore-castle was a large one, and was fitted up with a great number of bunks, a dining table with racks overhead, a large stove, and many other conveniences.

There were numerous closets, and in these were hung heavy sea boots, fur suits, reefing jackets, oilskin coats and trousers, thick woolen shirts, and all the articles of wearing apparel necessary in such a climate—enough, all told, to furnish twenty men.

Nat suddenly uttered an exclamation of astonishment, and holding up the lantern which he had lit in order to better explore the place, pointed to one of the bunks. The others crowded about him, and peering over his shoulder, they saw the skeleton of a man, dressed in sailor's garb, lying in the berth.

An examination disclosed five more of these ghastly evidences of the presence of man, but that was all.

"I see it all," said Nat, gravely; "the crew dead, alone in these inhospitable regions, the captain has gone on deck to look for help, and yon frozen effigy above our heads is all that remains of a once gallant commander."

"Who can he be?" murmurs Frank, half to himself.

"There have been many Arctic explorers," answered Nat, "and nearly all have been lost. This poor man is doubtless forgotten long before now."

"I'd just like to know who he is for curiosity," said Job, with a Yankee desire to get at the bottom of the mystery.

"We can probably ascertain by looking at his log-book, or upon the nautical instruments in the after cabin, and I have no doubt that we will learn all the particulars of this last fatal voyage."

"Suppose we go and look," remarked Chucks.

"Wait awhile; let us first continue our examination."

In the fore-castle were found many books, the collection being miscellaneous, and comprising works of fiction, travel and adventure, a few scientific, and one or two religious books, a volume or two of poems, a comic almanac, a cook book, and several copies of the plays of Shakspeare and two later dramatists.

Every Arctic explorer knows the necessity of keeping his officers and crew amused and entertained; consequently this vessel, whatever she was, had taken a small library along, made up, as sea libraries all ought to be, in a manner to suit every taste. Frank had noticed a case filled with numerous volumes in the cabin, but no particular attention had been paid to them at the time, the cabin being left for after inspection. Nat looked into the storerooms, and found several barrels of beef and pork, a large quantity of canned meats, soups, vegetables and preserves, all of which seemed to be in good condition, and he wondered greatly why the men should have starved to death, as they evidently had, when there was enough and to spare for all their wants.

"There is a deeper secret to be unraveled here than I supposed," he observed, turning to his fellows. "Be it our task to unravel this mystery. Let us search further."

The fore-castle hatch was found to have been secured strongly upon the inside, and Nat had no doubt that if the snow and ice above them were removed, it would be found that the hatch had been battered down.

There was nothing startling about this, as it had probably been done for reasons of safety and to retain all the heat in the fore-castle, the men passing through the cabin when they desired to go on deck.

It has usually been the custom aboard vessels obliged to winter in the ice for men to mix together freely and have everything in common, and that had doubtless been the case in this instance.

Nat, therefore, expressed no surprise that the fore-castle should have been closed from the deck. The very fact of there being a free passage leading to the cabin, which in most vessels is separated entirely from the rest of the vessel, and all means of communication shut off, being positive proof that the captain treated his crew, after their long imprisonment in the ice began, as so many comrades, treating all alike. In the lower hold they found a considerable quantity of wood and coal, sufficient to last all winter, and this was another clause of the strange secret which was entombed in the heart of the silent watcher upon the bowsprit, keeping his fruitless lookout amid snow and ice.

"I can understand why the captain should have been overtaken

suddenly by some fierce blast as he stood there trying to discover something, we know not what," observed Nat, "and that being instantly paralyzed, he had frozen to death as he stood, without the power to move hand or foot. All this I can explain, but why these men should have perished with so much at their command is a secret."

"And there's only six of them," muttered Job, "which, with the captain, makes seven. That isn't a ship's complement by any means."

"There is more of a secret about the ship than at first appears, but but I am resolved to know everything, if that is possible."

"Good for you, Nat!" granted the ruddy Chucks. "Supposing you find out all you want to, what ye're going to do then?"

"Spend the winter here, and then, as we have advanced so far, build a boat out of the remains of this ship and start for the open Polar Sea and the North Pole."

"True to your name, are you not?" said Frank.

"Yes; it was this one ambition that led my father into these seas, and he lost his life here. I shall not do that, for I mean that America shall be the first nation to discover the Pole, and if nothing fails me, I shall be the first American to be there."

"How in time be you going to build a boat?" asked Chucks, open mouthed.

"There are axes and saws, hammers, adzes, nails and rivets in abundance right here," answered Nat. "All we want is willing hands, brave hearts and patient endurance, and with those the work is already begun."

"You shall have 'em all!" exclaimed Job, fired with Nat's enthusiasm. "Go ahead, Nat, and we'll follow you as far as you want to go."

"Thanks!" said Nat. "Your prompt accession to the wish nearest my heart touches me deeply. We have nothing to fear, everything to hope! There is no danger of our perishing, and when the spring opens we can be all ready to set out, thereby gaining much valuable time. I promise you that if it is a possible thing, you shall all be at the North Pole in one year from now."

"Hurrah for North Pole Nat!" shouted Job, "I vote we make him our captain! What d'ye say?"

"Ay, ay!" they all shouted, and Nat was unanimously chosen to that most important position.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CAPTAIN ABANDONED—THE FATE OF TWO SAILORS—RETRIBUTION.

LET us return for awhile to the Arctic Fox and see what has happened since Nat's disappearance.

At the time that Mr. Cartwright's boat was seen to be falling behind, a squall struck the bark, being the same which afterwards came upon the captain's boat.

The shipkeeper, fearing that the crew on board would be insufficient to manage her, signaled to one of the boats to return, the order being observed by the waistboat in command of the second mate, Mr. Jones.

His crew, with the assistance of those already aboard, succeeded in managing the bark and took in sail, the boats of the first and second mates still being in the water.

Ed Lewis then went to the masthead again and signaled all the boats to return, in accordance with a plan entered into between him and Mr. Cartwright previous to starting out.

The mate allowed the second mate to pass him, and then returned to the vessel.

At this time the captain's boat was being towed by the whale—a fact well known to Lewis, notwithstanding that he had signaled for the return to the ship.

The third mate, Mr. Wright, being favorable to the captain, did not know of the plot against him, and seeing that the captain made no signs of returning, continued upon his course.

"The whales have disappeared, Mr. Cartwright," said Lewis, coming down from aloft, "and I have signaled the captain to return."

"Has he done so?"

"No, sir."

"Stand on a bit, Ed, and we will await him till nightfall; after that we must take care of ourselves, as the new ice is making fast, and we are in great danger of being caught."

This was said in order that there might seem to be a sufficient

excuse for the abandonment of the captain if ever the case came up afterwards.

The Arctic Fox was presumably standing on to be ready to take up the other boats, but in reality she was making little headway, the helmsman having been given a course to steer, which amounted to little else than laying to.

"You'd better go up again, Ed," said Mr. Cartwright, a half hour after his arrival on board, "and see if they are yet returning."

"Ay, ay, sir!" and the man, giving a wink to his superior which the latter fully understood, mounted to the crosstrees, glass in hand.

After a long look ahead, he suddenly shouted out:

"Mr. Wright's boat has swamped, sir, struck by a squall!"

The third mate's boat had swamped, but not for the reason given by the treacherous shipkeeper, the real state of the case being that the smaller whale, in sounding, had changed his course, coming directly for the other boat, and rising under it.

It was thrown up into the air to a considerable height and stove all to pieces, the men flying over one another's heads in great confusion.

The officer was struck by the heavy line tub and forced under water, being made insensible by the blow.

The harpooner got entangled in the line and was drawn under, and utterly unable to extricate himself, he was drowned, the same fate meeting two of the seamen who had never learned to swim—not a rare thing in many old sailors.

The other two men seized a pair of oars a piece and kept themselves afloat upon the ice, but as for any hope of being picked up, they might just as well have given up the idea and suffered themselves to be drowned.

Ed Lewis came down and reported the true state of the case to the mate, saying that the two seamen appeared to be still floating upon the waves.

"Let 'em float and be cursed to 'em!" growled the mate. "We're well rid of 'em! Ahoy there! Make ready to go in stays!" he shouted to the sailors gathered forward.

The men looked at one another, and one old tar advanced and touched his hat, saying:

"Are you going to put about, sir, when the skipper is still out?"

"Mind your own business and do as I say!" roared the officer, with an oath. "About ship there! Hard up your wheel!"

"Shall we go off and leave the captain this way, men?" asked the old sailor, appealing to his shipmates.

"No, no! It's a shame to abandon him!" said three or four of them.

"Do as I tell you!" thundered the mate. "You old fool, I command this vessel, and I mean to be obeyed! Fly around there lively! Don't you see we're all aback?"

The men flew to their tasks and put the vessel about, all except the old man and his adherents, who did nothing.

"Come aft here, Tom Bunt!" said the mate, when the maneuver had been successfully accomplished, and the man obeyed.

"What d'ye mean by this mutiny against my authority?" demanded Cartwright.

"It isn't mutiny, sir, but I didn't like to see the captain left alone, when there's every chance of his being picked up."

"There is, is there? Didn't you hear the shipkeeper say his boat had foundered?"

"No, sir, I didn't, and she ain't! I saw her myself, this very minute, towed by the big whale, and Job Hawkins makin' a second dart."

"Do you see her now?" asked the mate, scornfully.

Tom Bunt turned and looked in the direction of the boats, but a heavy mist had settled down between him and them, and nothing could be seen.

"No, sir, I don't, but I believe he's there all the same."

"Look here, you old reprobate, you're an old sailor and a good one, which makes what you say reasonable, but you don't know everything. If any other man had acted so he'd 've gone in irons right away."

"I only did what I thought right, sir."

"Who told you to think? Mutiny ain't right, whatever you can say. Mr. Jones, put those men in irons," pointing to Tom's followers. "You shall escape this time, Mr. Tom, but let me tell you to be careful. I am captain here now."

"But the skipper, sir?"

"The skipper is dead. Do you see that ice making all around us? The skipper can't reach us, and if we wait we'll be lost. He chose to disobey the signal to return, and must take the consequences. Now go below."

Tom obeyed reluctantly, not at all satisfied with the turn affairs had taken, feeling confident that the captain might have been picked up.

The two sailors floating alone on the sea saw the white wings of the bark turn about and the vessel speed away from them, and knew that they were without all hope.

The clouds shut in between them, and nothing was to be seen of vessel or boat, and they groaned in their agony of spirit, knowing that their case was a hopeless one.

The icy waters chilled them to the bone, and already that fatal drowsiness, which is the forerunner of death, was upon them.

"Cheer up, Jack," said one. "The skipper will be coming along pretty soon."

Poor Jack tried to smile, but his numbed hands were already slipping from his frail support, and before his comrade could aid him, he had dropped off into the sea and sank out of sight.

The lone sailor made a grab for him, but he merely succeeded in catching the oars, which found a better support for himself.

Alone in the darkness, the snow falling thickly about him, he drifted along with the tide, scarcely knowing he lived, while the ice began to surge about him, and threatened to crush him with its jagged sides.

He was conscious of being struck by something, and reaching out, seized it with one hand.

It was the steering oar lost from the captain's boat, and made a valuable addition to his raft.

His clothes were waterproof, and as very little moisture had penetrated, he was not in as much danger as he might have been had he been wet through, the water being warmer than the outer air.

Some time in the night he was conscious of crawling upon a cake of ice and drawing the oars up after him, so as not to come in direct contact with the ice.

Then, utterly exhausted, he fell asleep and knew no more, drifting along in the ice-choked current, helpless and alone.

On board the Arctic Fox the mate had assumed command, and was holding a consultation in his state-room with Mr. Jones and the shipkeeper in regard to their future movements.

"There is no doubt but what we can make Baffin's Bay, and thence take the current down and make land," he was saying.

"Does the current run south at this time?" asked Jones.

"Certainly, and won't be choked with ice. We can get out easy enough, and if we don't, we can make some point either in Greenland or British America."

"The current sets against us now," remarked Lewis, "and I believe we're making sternway all the time."

"Nonsense! We're making six knots, and by frequent tacking can make more. The wind's against us—that's bad—but with our sharp cutwater and strong bows, the new ice won't bother us much."

They were not as safe as they supposed, for during the night the man on the lookout fell asleep, and ten minutes later the vessel crashed into an iceberg, carrying away her bowsprit and three feet of her bows.

A mass of ice, weighing several tons, becoming detached from the berg, fell upon the deck and completed the work of destruction, the bark foundering in ten minutes, being buoyed up for a while by the berg, upon one part of which she had slid for several feet.

Thus did a horrible fate stare in the faces of the men who had so heartlessly abandoned their kind captain.

CHAPTER VIII.

CARTWRIGHT'S PLANS—CHUCKS MAKES A DISCOVERY.

At the first crash Cartwright rushed upon deck, and seeing what had happened, ordered the two boats, with the spare ones on the house, to be lowered at once, and as much water and provisions put into them as was possible under the circumstances.

The larboard and waist boats were lowered, and into them scrambled Cartwright, Jones, Ed Lewis, the carpenter, cook, and a dozen seamen, when they were pulled away with all possible speed.

Cartwright secured the nautical instruments, two kegs of water,

some cooked meat, and a keg of hardtack, Jones seeing that his boat was equally well supplied with provisions.

No one thought of the men below in irons, and they were left to their fate, many sharing the same fortune, as in the hurry and confusion one of the spare boats was capsized while being lowered.

Two or three of the sailors got off the wooden cover of the try-works and made an extemporized raft of it, putting on a barrel of water and provisions, which they lashed as firmly as they could, taking a pair of oars to guide their queer craft.

Old Tom Bunt scrambled out upon the ice none too soon, for the bark settled immediately afterward, and more than a dozen souls were lost.

The two boats—the officers unheeding the cries of the men to be saved—put off into the current, leaving the poor wretches to be drowned or float about upon the ice.

Little did Cartwright care whether they were saved or not as long as he was secure, and he actually struck one poor fellow over the head as he clung to the gunwale of the boat, and pushed him into the sea.

When morning came, the three traitors found themselves on the shores of an almost desolate coast, the ice fast closing in, and a howling tempest of mingled snow and sleet prevailing.

They hauled their boats upon the shore, and turning them up, got under their lee and remained there until the storm abated, which was not until late in the afternoon.

"The winter has set in," said Cartwright, the next morning, when he arose and looked about him, "and in spite of all our efforts we must remain here for nearly nine long, dreary months."

"I don't see as it can be helped now," muttered Jones.

"I have a plan."

"What is it?"

"The Esquimaux and Indians of these parts are not over friendly to the whites, and I don't propose to trust them, but up north I know of a ship where we can remain in safety."

"A ship?"

"Yes—abandoned in the ice in the region of perpetual snow. She is well supplied, and will afford us a safe shelter from the winds."

"And after that?"

"After that we can make our way over the waters of Kane Bay, or some other channel, to land, and get a ship."

"It's a hard outlook."

"But the only one. Let us drag our boats thither and secure a shelter at once."

"It is two or three hundred miles at least."

"And can be accomplished in ten days at the outside."

Some of the men demurred, and four or five set out alone on foot towards the south, determined to risk finding a shelter in that direction rather than go further north.

The next morning their bodies were found, frozen stiff, by a party of Esquimaux.

Cartwright prevailed upon this same party to provide them with sledges, and he and his comrades, with six men besides, started out on their perilous journey.

"What is the name of the ship you expect to find?" asked Jones on the morning of the third day after their departure. "I had forgotten all about that until now."

"It is the Adventurer."

"What! The exploring vessel commanded by that mad—"

"Sh! Yes, it is the same. I know where she lies, and though it is a rough journey, it is our only chance."

For the present we will leave the treacherous party, for whom a worse fate was prepared than that which befell the captain, and return to our hero up among the desolate regions, where the silent figure of the frozen captain stood guard over the abandoned ship.

After Nat had been unanimously chosen as the leader of the little band, he proposed that they should return to the cabin and try and determine their position by the sextant.

"I am afraid we can't do that, my young friend," remarked Job, "for the sun don't seem to shine for a cent."

"It will come out some day, anyhow, and if only for a minute, that will be long enough. You understand navigation?"

"Like a book."

"Then you shall teach me."

"With all my heart."

"And I will join the class also," spoke up Frank, his girlish face lighting up with a smile. "I'm bound to do everything that Nat does."

"Good enough!" yelled Chucks, slapping his fat sides. "I honestly believe you're in love with Nat."

Frank blushed deeply, but made no reply, and by this time they were once more in the cabin.

"I'll tell you what you can do, Chucks," said Nat; "take one of the axes and clear away the ice from the stove-pipe hole up there aft."

"Well?"

"Then we'll rig up the pipe that's in the closet there, and we'll have a fire roaring in this stove in less than no time."

"Good enough! Golly, you're an artist, Nat! Who'd ever have thought of doing that?"

"You would if you weren't so fat," answered Job. "Nobody would ever feel cold that had such a furnace inside 'em as you've got. It's a wonder you don't melt the ice when you sit on it."

Chucks laughed with the rest, being remarkably good natured, and then went on deck to perform his allotted task.

While he cleared away the hole, Nat put the stove in order, Frank brought in coal, and Job got the pipe, and with a sound ax cut enough wood from the lower hold forward to start a fire with.

At last the hole was cleared, the pipe fitted, a roaring fire started in the stove by means of a flint and steel—though there were plenty of matches among the party—and before long a slight warmth began to be perceptible in the place.

The dead-eyes and port-holes, being covered thickly with ice and snow, admitted no light, and they were dependent upon their lamps for illumination.

The cabin was still quite cold, the thermometer standing at the freezing point, and quite a roaring fire had to be built before they could with safety take off their outer coverings.

It is no uncommon thing for mercury to freeze in thermometers when exposed to the air in those high latitudes, and, therefore, the one in the ship's cabin contained spirit, which can register a greater degree of cold than an ordinary instrument.

Frank was astonished to see that the marks below the sun line indicated as much as sixty degrees, and asked if they were expected to see it go down as far as that.

Nat told him that forty degrees below zero was not an uncommon point for the thermometer to register, and that fifty and even sixty degrees below zero had been known.

"When it gets to thirty below, an extra ten or twenty degrees don't make much difference," remarked Chucks, entering at that moment and hearing the subject of the conversation.

"I don't suppose it would to you," said Job. "You couldn't tell much how cold it was after that, unless it got down to a hundred."

"What you got a fire for, anyhow?" asked Chucks, beginning to blow. "'Tain't cold in here."

"Look at the thermometer," said Frank.

"My! just look how she jumps!" he said, putting his tongue on the bulb. "Ow, what's the matter?"

"You've frozen your tongue to the bulb, that's all," said Frank, laughing. "It will come off all right."

"It's off now, and a bit of skin with it. I didn't suppose it was so cold as all that. It's got to forty-two, anyhow."

"That's ten degrees," remarked Nat. "Shut the door tight, Frank, and we'll have it comfortable here in a little while."

Before half an hour the register was sixty degrees, and the party began throwing aside their hoods, mittens and boots, the heat being considerable after the extreme cold.

"We must keep up a fire right along," said Nat, "and have one in the fore-castle, too, after we've buried those poor fellows; but we must all take plenty of exercise, and not be afraid to go outside in the cold, unless, of course, it's extremely bitter, and above all—"

"Is the lead-colored sky," said Chucks, "and we can't use these instruments till the sun comes out."

"No, not that—but above all, we must all take a cold bath every morning."

"Ugh! you make me shiver," said Chucks, with a comical expression on his chubby face. "What's that for?"

"So you won't be apt to freeze to death some of these cold nights."

"The remedy is as bad as what you want to prevent. Cold baths! Ugh! I feel as if there was an iceberg crawling down my back at this minute. Wonder how high the spirit is."

"I've got some coffee," said Job, who had just come from the storeroom, "and, though it's rather old, it has a good flavor yet. Suppose we have some of it?"

"What was your father's name, Nat?" said Chucks, presently, while Job was grinding the coffee and Frank heating the water.

"Alonzo," answered Nat.

"Are you sure? Wasn't it N. Evans, New York," as if reading from something.

Nat observed the tone, and turned quickly towards Chucks.

"Where do you see that?" he asked, quickly.

"On this thermometer."

CHAPTER IX.

THE SECRET IS PARTLY REVEALED.

NAT was at Chucks' side in an instant.

"Where do you see it?" he cried, excitedly.

"Here on the bottom, engraved on a plate. Don't you see it? It says 'N. Evans, New York,' as plain as daylight."

It was not because Nat did not see the inscription that he kept silence, but because his heart was too full to permit him to speak.

"What's the matter?" asked Frank, suddenly turning to Nat and seeing his pale face, his own instantly flushing scarlet. "Are you ill?"

"No. Bring me the quadrant in the locker yonder."

Frank brought it and put it into Nat's hands.

There was a silver plate upon the lower portion of one of the bars, and this was engraved with several lines of letters.

"You'll find a piece of chamois skin there, most likely, too, Frank. Will you bring it?"

Frank found it, sure enough, and Nat quickly applied it to the engraved plate, making the following inscription visible.

"NATHAN ALONZO EVANS,

"NEW YORK CITY, U. S. A.

"MASTER SHIP ADVENTURER."

"Golly! who'd have supposed it?" said Chucks, as Nat read off the inscription.

"This instrument belonged to my father," said Nat. "He was named Nathan Alonzo, and was generally called by the latter name to avoid confusion, as I was called Nat. He often used to put 'N. Evans' on his books, however."

"The Adventurer was his last ship, wasn't it?" asked Job; "and she never came back?"

"No. He set out to discover the North Pole, and since that time we have never seen or heard from him."

"We are aboard the Adventurer now!"

"Why do you think so?"

"Because I saw the name on the men's chests, and on the things in the cupboards. I didn't think anything about it before."

"Here it is on the chronometer," said Frank, suddenly. "It says in plain writing:

"'Made for ship Adventurer, Arctic explorer, N. A. Evans, master, by Hart Bros., nautical instruments, N. Y.'"

"One of the secrets has been revealed to us, then," said Nat.

"Yes, and another, for if this vessel is the Adventurer, then that ice-bound watcher above our heads is——"

"Who?" said all three in a breath.

"My father!"

"It must be so," said Frank, "for I have heard that he never would desert his ship."

"It is he beyond a doubt," said Nat; "but I cannot understand why only six men should have remained to him out of a large crew. There were about fifty, I believe, including officers and men."

"The water's boiling," said Chucks. "Slap in your coffee, Job, and I'll pour in the water. The best thing to do now is to get supper, for, remember, we haven't had anything to eat since breakfast."

"Right! We must not neglect our regular habits," said Nat. "Do you know, that, now I have found my father's vessel, it seems more than ever incumbent upon me to follow up his plans. We will construct a new vessel from this one in the spring, and set sail at once for the open Polar Sea."

"What will you do for masts and spars?" asked Chucks.

"There are extra ones in the hold and on deck," answered Job, who had already made a second tour of inspection.

"And sails!"

"Make 'em. There's all the sailcloth we want stowed away in the steward's cabin. It'll give us employment these winter nights."

"That's all right," said Chucks. "I did not want to discourage you, but only to see that you did not get too sanguinary."

"Sanguine, you mean," said Nat. "Now, to have our supper, for I see through the door there which Job has left open that it's already night."

For supper they had some good strong coffee, taken as hot as they could drink it, a kettle of beef soup with fresh vegetables, hardtack and preserved peaches, a meal which, for a set of castaways, might have been considered remarkably luxurious.

Nat fixed the fire so that it could not go out, putting on sufficient coal to make it last all night, and then they all turned in, the berths of the cabin being in good shape, and slept until morning.

The change from a bed in a snowbank, or under the lee of a broken boat or jagged rock, to a comfortable berth in a well-warmed cabin was a delightful one indeed to our wanderers, and they appreciated it to the utmost.

In the morning Nat awoke and aroused them all, made them take a run across the ice hall a mile and back before they had anything to eat or drink.

When they returned, all in a glow, as might have been expected, Chucks puffing like a porpoise, they all had a mug of hot coffee, and then, after taking another run, sat down to breakfast, which was substantial, but not so varied as the meal of the night before.

"One thing must be done first of all," said Nat, "before we do anything else. The men in the forecabin and the silent guardian upon deck must be buried, as that is a duty we owe to humanity."

The bodies were brought out one by one and laid upon the ice, all hands then preparing to cut holes into which to place them.

A crosscut saw was provided, and the work of cutting begun; but though the party went some distance from the ship, where the ice seemed to be newer, they found that they would have to cut at least six feet before reaching water.

The task was, therefore, too arduous for them to undertake, and instead, they cut a long trench, about three feet wide and deep, with picks and axes, and thus laid the bodies in, covering them with sailcloth, after which they threw in the loose ice.

Having done this sad duty, the next thing was the removal of the frozen figure from the bowsprit.

This was quite a task, as the figure was one mass of solid ice, weighing many hundred pounds, and riveted, as it were, to the bowsprit in a position most difficult of access.

Nat, believing the body to be that of his father, hesitated about doing it any injury, and yet it seemed almost impossible to get it down without cutting it to pieces.

At last, seeing that the task was more difficult than he had thought, and unwilling to disfigure the body in any way, Nat concluded that he had better let it remain where it was.

"Let him continue in the future, as he has in the past, to watch over the ship," said Nat. "Now that it is our home, it will seem all the more appropriate that I should have such a guardian."

The silent figure, with the glass ever raised to its eyes, which saw nothing, remained, therefore, at his post, and kept his unremitting watch night and day, while the wind whistled and the snow whirled around him, and the long Polar night gradually drew near.

When this task had been abandoned it was time for dinner, and Nat and all hands went below and indulged in a hearty meal, Job and Chucks enjoying a smoke after it.

"Now, the next thing to do is to find out what time it is, and wind up our chronometers," said Nat, "and after that not let them run down."

"How are you going to find out?" asked Chucks.

"What day was it that we lowered for those whales?"

"September 24," said Frank. "I remember that, because the next day was my birthday."

"This is the eighth day since, and consequently the second of October. Put that down on the calendar. October 2, 1869, is the present day. We arrived here on the first. In another month we shall have the night upon us."

Job wound the chronometer and set it, at a guess, for noon, meaning to correct it afterwards, as soon as he could take an observation.

"We'll call it twelve o'clock," said Job, "because it can't be far away from that. When I get a chance to look at the sun I'll fix him all right."

"Hello, I say! Get your hydrant, or whatever you call it, and come right away on deck!" yelled Chucks, bouncing down the companionway, and into the inner cabin. "The sun's coming out!"

This was welcome news indeed, and Job hurried upon deck, instrument in hand.

The sun was indeed struggling to pierce the thick mass of clouds, and all hearts were beating high, as the question of setting the time was not the only one that was to be determined.

They were to discover how far north they were, and whether they were on land or in the midst of the frozen ocean.

Gradually the sun broke through the clouds and darted his warm rays for an instant upon the little group standing on the deck of the lone ship.

Joe clapped his eye to the instrument in an instant, and began adjusting it to the proper angles.

At last he had it to suit his purpose, and he squinted through the telescope, muttering something to himself.

"Twelve o'clock!" he shouted in a few moments. "Set your old clock! Now, let me get another squint, and I'll tell you where we are!"

He called out several numbers, which Nat marked on a slate, and then as the sun disappeared once more, went below to get his reckoning.

"Get out a chart!" he said presently. "We are in latitude 62 N., and longitude 71 W. Didn't think we were so far north."

Nat spread out the chart, and Job pointed to a place upon it.

"We are beyond Griswold Land," he said—"beyond Kane Basin."

"Are we on the water or land?"

"We are stuck on the rocks, my lad—forced up by the ice! May the Lord help us when it breaks up!"

CHAPTER X.

A GREAT DISCOVERY—THE BEGINNING OF THE NARRATIVE.

"It is now October," remarked Nat, "and therefore we cannot expect to see the sun again for six months. For nearly one month we will have a sort of twilight, and then, from November till March, total darkness."

"Oh, Golly! Won't there be any light at all?" asked Chucks, in a doleful tone.

"Except that given by the aurora, which, I have heard, is remarkably brilliant within the Polar circle."

"Then, if we are going to have light, I hope it will be a roarer, and no mistake."

"Do you mean that for a joke, Chucks?" asked Frank.

"Well, yes, such was my intention."

"Do you know what the Esquimaux do with fat fellows that make wretched puns?"

"No."

"Then I'll tell you. They roast 'em over a hot fire, and when they are nicely done, they eat 'em. Just think of that!"

"Oh, Lord, Master Frank, you don't mean that, do you?" said Chucks, with a comical imitation of terror.

"However, if you will promise not to do so any more, I guess that they won't harm you."

"All right, Master Frank, just you speak a good word for me, won't you?"

"Come here, boys," said Nat, suddenly, "I have found the log of the Adventurer."

"Read it, Nat," said Job; "you may find a clew to the secrets of this place."

"I will. Close the doors tight, Chucks, and Frank, old fellow, will you keep the fire agoing?"

"You needn't read it to us if you don't want to, Nat," said the harpooner, considerately; "there may be things in it what you wouldn't want any but yourself to know."

"I have no secrets from you, Job. We have but one life in common, now, but one aim, and that is, to find the North Pole."

Frank and Chucks had by this time completed their allotted tasks,

and all hands then drew around the cabin table, Nat spreading the book out before him.

In the narrative which follows we shall give only such portions as relate directly to our story and to the secret held still inviolable by the grim sentinel upon the bowsprit.

Having secured the closest attention, Nat cleared his throat and began the following romantic history, which we call—

THE CRUISE OF THE ADVENTURER.

August 7, 1866. —We weighed anchor this afternoon and set sail from Cumberland Island, British North America, where we have been recruiting for the last two weeks.

All promises well for our search, and I have no doubt now that we shall reach a point far enough north to enable us to get to the open sea before the worst part of the winter sets in.

From there I shall not venture to take the vessel, but in the sectional boats shall launch upon that still untraveled highway, the Polar Sea, and direct my course along the parallel of 75 deg. west longitude straight to the North Pole.

How I wish I had Nat with me! The boy takes such a lively interest in my affairs, and particularly in this crowning ambition of my life, the finding of the Pole, that it would afford me the utmost satisfaction if he could share the glory which I feel I shall at length acquire.

We are well supplied with everything that we can need, provisions, wood, coal, lights, instruments of all kinds, boats which can be carried easily upon one's back, taking up very little room when folded up, besides everything else needed.

Never before have I made my preparations upon so extensive a scale, and if it is possible for any man to accomplish this feat, I feel assured that I shall be that fortunate individual who first sets foot upon the northern extremity of the world, if I may so call it.

My crew is harmonious, and, to a man, all with me in my project. Cartwright, in particular, seems to be thoroughly imbued with the idea of finding the Pole.

I have never started out under such bright auspices, and I seem to feel already that I have succeeded. May the future be as full of promise as the present.

August 18.—We have passed through Smith's sound, and have seen icebergs. The ice is forming earlier than usual, but I still have hopes of being able to get far enough north to carry out my project of wintering upon the shores of the open sea.

August 23.—What do these strange forebodings mean? The men all becoming discontented, rebellious, almost mutinous. Someone is at work poisoning their minds against me. Of this I feel the assured, but who is the man?

The ice is growing alarmingly thick in the water, and sometimes we have great difficulty in getting through. We are now as far north as any one has ever penetrated, but I am not satisfied with that, and am determined to go further.

I have not such a good idea of Cartwright as I had, and I fear that he is the man who is setting the men against me.

To-day I reasoned with him, but it did not seem to have any effect upon his hardened nature.

"Why are you discontented?" I asked him.

"Because I don't want to stay here all the winter in the middle of ice and snow."

"The ship is perfectly safe."

"Suppose she should get crushed between the ice. Would she be safe then?"

"She will not be."

"How can you tell? Such a catastrophe is liable to occur to any one."

"And if she does, shall we not be able to live at ease in the wreck? Besides that, we have our boats and abundance of provisions."

"What would you do if she was wrecked?"

"Make my way to the Pole, and then return with the news of my glorious discovery."

"Return indeed! How could you return with your ship a wreck?"

"Build a smaller one from what remained."

"Bah! Evans. I tell you your idea is thoroughly impracticable. You can never reach the Pole."

"But you were the man who, not more than a month since, was the most enthusiastic person in all my crew."

"Because I did not then know the dangers which attend a winter

in the ice; because I did not know how many men have perished wretchedly in attempting the same foolhardy task which you have set yourself."

"You may think what you please, Cartwright," I answered, my breast heaving, and with difficulty restraining my temper, "but you have no right to influence others."

"I have not influenced them, I tell you."

"And I tell you that you have. You have been going around telling them that I mean to endanger their lives merely to satisfy my own selfish ambitions. You have told them that I would not hesitate to sacrifice every man of them if it would advance my own interests."

"It is a lie!" shrieked he, turning ghastly pale; but my shot had told, and I knew he was the guilty man. Henceforth I shall beware of Mr. Cartwright.

CHAPTER XI.

THE NARRATIVE CONTINUED.

WHEN our hero had reached this point he paused from excitement, as well as from want of breath, for he had read in a rapid, nervous manner, which, although perfectly intelligible, excited the others more than it did himself.

"Golly, I wonder if that's the same Cartwright what was mate on the whaler?" said Chucks.

"Without doubt," said Nat; "the name is not a common one, by any means."

"Besides that," said Frank, "he was with your father in his last voyage."

They all looked wonderingly at Frank as he uttered these words, and he blushed like a girl, saying, quickly:

"So I have been told by those who knew Captain Evans."

"Why, Frank, my lad," said Nat, laughing, "you are a regular wonder book to me. I never knew you were acquainted with any of my father's friends, or that you knew anything concerning his voyages."

"Well, I don't know very much, but I know this, that Mr. Cartwright bore your father no good-will, and there are those who told me that he deserted his captain."

"The wretch, I'd like to get hold of him once," remarked Chucks. "Golly, I'd roast him over a slow fire instead of a hot one, like them Esquimaux what Master Frank tells about."

They all laughed at this sally from the rosy tub-oarsman, but none guessed that the rascally mate had again abandoned his captain, and that James Hathaway might not have perished, nor they have been in this inhospitable place, but for his villainy.

"The ruffian didn't have any intention o' goin' to the Pole, I don't believe," remarked Job.

"Yes, he did," answered Frank, quickly, "but he was jealous that an American should have the honor of discovering it, and acted like a dog in the manger."

"Wasn't he an American himself?" asked Nat, in surprise.

"No, he was an Englishman, and sooner than permit any American to have the honor, he would forego it himself, if nothing else would do."

"An Englishman?" said all three, again gazing so earnestly at Frank as to cause him to blush more deeply than before.

"Yes, and, had he been in command, would have gone on and completed the work your father began so nobly."

"Why, Frank, I never had any idea you knew so much," said Nat, smiling. "You are a regular riddle."

Frank made no answer, but Job, with the curiosity characteristic of the true Yankee, said:

"Where did ye find out all this, Frank?"

"I am better acquainted with Mr. Cartwright than you are aware, but suppose we go on with this narrative. I am anxious to know more, having learned so much already."

"Throw in some fuel, Chucks," said Nat.

"All right, I'll chuck it in, for I am the man that chucks. That's how I got my name."

"And I will be the boy that chucks Chucks into the pot when those Esquimaux get at him," laughed the handsome cabin boy.

"Golly! don't say anything more about it, and I'll be as dumb as an oyster."

"Go ahead, Nat," said Frank, when the laughter had subsided, and Nat continued his reading:

August 31, 1866.—A cruel blow has fallen upon me. A day or so after the conversation with Cartwright, the ice became more difficult to pass through, and I began to feel alarmed myself.

I would have started earlier than I did, but this man Cartwright delayed me at Cumberland Island more than a week, and I should not have been there two days, at the outside.

I can now see his motive plainly, and I am confident that he never intended I should reach the Pole. He didn't dare to kill me, for that was a step which his wicked companions would not take.

They would have had no hesitation in abandoning me, but to kill me outright was rather more than they cared to do, though I believe Cartwright would have attempted it, had he not been afraid that they would avenge my murder upon him.

It was noon, and I had just taken an observation, finding to my intense surprise and gratification that we were in north latitude 84, two degrees higher than any recorded journey ever made.

I had gone below to enter this in my regular log, when I heard a confused murmur upon deck, the sound of angry voices now and again rising high above the hubbub.

Filled with a grave apprehension which I dared not express in words, I hastily armed myself with a cutlass and rushed upon deck.

A strange sight met my astonished gaze, which for an instant nearly paralyzed me.

Arranged upon one side of the deck were all but seven or eight of my crew, led by the arch traitor Cartwright, all well armed and evidently desperate.

On the other side were the few who remained faithful, and, though they were but a handful, they appeared fully as determined as their opponents, in spite of the disparity in their numbers.

"What means this disturbance?" I asked, in firm tones.

Cartwright stepped forward a few paces and thus addressed me, his proud lip curling with scorn:

"It means that fifty odd and more lives are not to be sacrificed to the whims of a mad visionary. It means that we are determined to go no further north. It means that unless our demands are complied with quietly we shall enforce our rights by the strength of our stout arms."

"This is mutiny!" I cried, enraged, never fearing them, though they far outnumbered me and my still faithful followers. Had they been a hundred, and but a single man remained true to me, I would not have feared them.

"Call it what you please," sneered the traitor. "We are the stronger party and you must submit."

"Never!" I cried, swinging my cutlass. "Stand by me if you are men, and give this traitor his merited reward!"

The faithful eight flew to my side and ranged themselves behind me.

"Understand me, Cartwright," I said, "mutiny, in any case, is a crime, but how much more so in such a place as this—away up in the frozen regions of the Pole—it becomes doubly criminal.

"Our lot is a common one, and it is our sacred duty to stand by one another, to aid each other; not to quarrel. What can you hope for if you leave the ship?"

"I do not intend to leave the ship, but to take it back to the United States while yet there is time."

"Rash man, do you know that before you reach Baffin's Bay the ice will have closed in around you and shut off your escape? Here we are safe, for even should the ice encompass us we can beach our vessel and in the spring set her afloat once more."

I saw that my words had had considerable effect upon many of the rebellious crew, and so did Cartwright. He evidently determined not to let me get the advantage, however, for, waving his cutlass, he cried, in a loud voice:

"The best argument, my friends, is that of deeds, not words. Upon them, and let us see who will conquer!"

They threw themselves headlong upon our little party, and a tremendous struggle ensued, during which two of my men were slain and I received a wound, so that I am still weak from loss of blood.

So gallantly did my men behave, however, that though our loss was but two, that of the enemy was seven killed and more than that badly wounded, showing that the fight if not the might was upon our side.

Presently, in the pause of the battle, Cartwright called a truce and said he would give me one more day to determine what I would do.

To this we all agreed, but in the night, midway in the morning

watch, there came a great shock, and running up to see what had happened, I found that the ship had run into a solid mass of ice which immediately closed all around us! We were lost!

CHAPTER XII.

MURDERED AND ABANDONED.

NAT paused at this juncture, and he and his companions held a lively discussion upon the villainy of the mate and his followers.

"That accounts for our finding so few here," said Frank. "The others doubtless left their comrades to their fate."

"There seems to be a pause here," said Nat, "though there is no fresh date."

"Your father stopped to get his dinner," retorted Chucks, "and I think we had better do the same."

"You don't think of anything but eatin', Chucks," said Job.

"Yes, I do, there's two other things besides that which I pay particular attention to."

"What are they?"

"Drinking and sleeping."

"You are right, my jolly tub-oar. With that barrel gun of yours, though, you ought to fetch down a fat bear for us."

"Shall I go on?" asked Nat.

"Yes."

Nat thereupon began once more and continued the reading of a narrative in which all hands took a deep interest:

I could not tell whether the helmsman had steered the vessel purposely upon the ice or not, but there we were, completely blocked in, the jibboom broken off short, and the mainmast badly sprung.

There was nothing to be done but wait until morning, so I gave a few general orders and returned to my cabin.

When the sun appeared above the horizon, I went on deck, feeling as if I had slept a longer time than usual.

On all hands extended the ice, a white, glittering mass, with fantastic peaks here and there, and away in the distance a huge iceberg.

There was not a sound to break the awful stillness, and for the first time, my courage began to fail me.

Not a soul was in sight, and the cold was so intense that I feared they had overslept themselves, a dangerous thing to do in these latitudes.

I called aloud for someone to come on deck, but there was no answer, and in a moment the truth began to dawn upon me.

I had been abandoned!

Rushing down to my cabin, I now, for the first time, perceived a strong odor of chloroform, and a hasty search revealed a bottle of the stuff lying in my berth close to my pillow.

I gazed at the chronometer, and saw that there was but an hour or so of daylight remaining, and that I had slept several hours beyond my time.

The chloroform explained this, and I did not doubt that Cartwright had administered the drug as I lay asleep.

Throwing open the cabin doors so that the fresh air might enter, I passed through into the fore-castle for the purpose of ascertaining if the men had been drugged in the same manner as myself, never doubting now that Cartwright had served us all in the same way.

When I opened the fore-castle door, which was quite tight and impervious to draughts, a heavy, sickening odor greeted my nostrils.

The air was charged with carbonic acid, and I felt so faint that I returned to the cabin, leaving the doors open so that a strong draught swept through the ship.

I hastened upon deck, and found that there was still time enough to take an observation.

Trembling with excitement, I worked the reckoning, and found that I had reached 86 degrees of north latitude.

Within four degrees of the Pole, and abandoned by my companions! The thought was maddening.

The remainder of the journey could easily be made in a week, or even if it took a month, what was that? We had our boats, and, more than that, we had balloons.

These balloons were not meant to carry passengers, but to assist us in traveling, the provisions and necessary tools being put aboard, and then the balloons sent up.

A stout cord or rope prevented them from escaping, and really the assistance they would give one in making his way over the rough ice was not to be lightly estimated.

I had thought of this idea myself, and never doubted its feasibility. The balloons, under the guidance of men, were converted into aerial sledges, in which we transported our supplies, and though not adopted for traveling purposes, would answer very well for the end in view.

I had never used them, but I did not for a moment doubt their value, and determined to put my theory into practice in a few days.

Hurrying to the store-room where they were kept, what was my horror to find that it had been broken open.

Every balloon, every section boat, every spare oar and mast, and a large supply of provisions, had been taken away, and I felt myself utterly overcome.

Abandoned by my crew, left destitute of the means by which to accomplish my purpose, I felt deserted indeed.

I would not have minded being alone had the means been at hand by which I might make my way to the Pole, but to be cheated of this glory by the miserable villains who had abandoned me was too much for human endurance.

In my agony I cursed my fate and my treacherous companions, and even blasphemed my Maker.

God help me for having so far forgotten myself, but He knows how horribly I was tempted, and I am sure has forgiven me.

After awhile I grew calmer, and then returned to the fore-castle, the noxious odor having somewhat abated.

To my surprise, I found my six faithful comrades lying in their beds, and I called to them to arouse themselves.

Suddenly an awful suspicion crossed my mind.

I threw open the door of the little stove which gave warmth to the place; the fire was out, but the truth dawned on me at once.

The poor fellows had been killed by the fumes of the charcoal which Cartwright had filled the stove with.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NARRATIVE CONCLUDES—SURPRISES.

"THAT accounts for their death in the midst of plenty," said Nat, pausing when he reached that point.

"And that makes another secret which we have found out," interrupted Chucks. "Seems to me the place is full of them."

"I can make the whole business out now," said Job. "This here Cartwright, arter the men had turned in, lit the charcoal and smothered 'em; then he turned his attention to your pop."

"How terrible must have been his feelings of revenge," resumed our hero. "He would not leave my father even the gratification of having company in these awful solitudes, for without doubt these six men would have staid by him."

"He is a miserable scamp!" ejaculated Chucks, "and if I ever meet him, I'd just send one of those bombs clean through him, wouldn't you, Frank?"

"Don't ask me," said the boy, turning away his face and coloring deeply, from what cause Nat could not then make out.

"There are not many more entries," said Nat, "and I will read them. We have discovered several things which puzzled us, and I am eager to know more."

September 10, 1866.—I am utterly alone! I have no doubt that Cartwright has made his way to the south, but it may be that he has gone on, and having made that discovery which mankind has been striving to make since the earliest times, has returned, flushed with triumph.

I have gone on deck several times, and have tried to discover some opening in the ice, but as yet the glass fails to reveal anything.

Snow has fallen heavily upon several days in succession, and I have not seen the sun for a week. The shrouds and rigging have been broken down by the weight of snow and ice, and of the masts nothing but stumps remain.

I dare not leave the ship, for the cold is so intense at times that do I but go upon deck for a few minutes I am almost benumbed.

I look forward with horror to the winter which is fast approaching, and wonder if I shall survive it.

Had I a companion, even though it were a dog, or cat, or even a rat, the solitude would not be so oppressive; but to be alone, where, day after day, never a sound is heard, never a sign of life is seen, is too horrible to think of.

I have seen neither men nor animals since we came here, and I fear that I am in one of those miserable regions of our earth which is utterly devoid of life.

No birds, no stunted bushes, no animals of any kind whatever, and no Esquimaux or any signs of them, I cannot but think that I have passed the limit of human habitation, and that beyond there is nothing but desolation and death.

September 20.—There is no hope. I have been every day to my station on the bowsprit to see if I can discover any opening in the ice, any signs of life, but without success.

The decks are covered with snow, which helps to retain the heat within the vessel. It has frozen so hard that my feet do not sink in it, and upon one side it is piled so high as to form an easy road to the ice beyond.

I have been upon the ice occasionally, though not to a great distance, as I fear to lose sight of the vessel.

There is food in abundance, and had I a companion, I should be entirely contented, but this terrible loneliness is wearing upon me, and I fear will bring on a fit of sickness, which I dread more than anything.

October 1, 1866.—It is very cold, and although I keep the fires going, they do not seem to make me any more comfortable. I shall have to put up another stove in the cabin. I know I am getting sick, and perhaps I ought not to go out so much, but what can I do?

I have worn a deep place in the snow upon the bowsprit, from standing there so much, but I cannot resist keeping my lookout, for within me is a hope that someone will yet find their way thither.

I have seen no signs of Cartwright, the boats, balloons, or men, and if they have not perished, they have undoubtedly made their way to the south.

They will not return, I feel positive, but I will not believe that others may not some day come here to share my loneliness, and so I keep my watch every day, and strain my eyes in the hope of seeing someone.

Before I close this book for the day, I will write down the hope that I have of somebody's coming here, and shall then go on deck to see what I can discover through the glass.

May the good God above watch over my son Nat, and if I do perish, as I may, in spite of my ardent hopes of once more seeing my old home, I trust that He who made will guard the boy aright, and bring him to manhood.

It is my wish that he follow up the researches I have made, and, if it is possible, find the Pole.

There is a considerable treasure in this ship, and if any man should find it, I charge him to give it to my son, if living, and if not, to use it only for the purpose of making further research.

The villains would have taken that, had they known where it was, but it is still safe, and shall remain so until I am delivered, or my son hears of my fate.

Now to go on deck and try once more to penetrate the awful gloom. Heaven grant that I may find some signs of life.

"That is all," said Nat, closing the book. "For the last time my poor father went to his station above us, and, doubtless, as he stood there, filled with the one hope of discovering something which would relieve the despair of his mind, became benumbed, and in that position was frozen to death."

"Where he has remained a silent warder of the spot for three years," murmured Frank.

"Golly! Don't it strike you as funny?" said Chucks.

"What? That he should have been frozen to death?"

"No, no, but that this last entry should be made upon the very day, three years since, that we came here?"

"It is a singular coincidence," remarked Nat, "but there is something which I do not like in this business."

"What is that?" asked all three in a breath.

"It is three years since my father died. During that time there have been no thaws—nothing but continual storms."

"How so?" asked Job.

"The figure on the bowsprit is your answer. Would that have remained where it is had there been any summers?"

"My God! we are in the region of perpetual winter!" said Frank.

"A land hitherto undiscovered," said Nat.

"I don't feel proud at having discovered it," chuckled the round and rosy Chucks. "I'd rather be down where they have an occasional warm spell."

"What about your open sea, Nat?" asked Job.

"It may still exist, and where we are now is a belt of ice which

never melts, but forms a perennial barrier to all progress further north."

"Do you think you can pass it and reach the sea?"

"I shall endeavor to do so. You are with me?"

"Heart and hand, my boy. You can rely on me until death."

"And upon me until supper time," said Chucks.

Frank colored deeply, took Nat's hand and added:

"And upon me forever!"

"Thanks, my boy; it gives me the utmost gratification to find you so firm a friend."

"Have I not always been one?"

"Yes; though once I fancied that you were offended at me on account of something which Cartwright said to you."

"Don't speak his name; I hate it!" cried Frank, passionately. "Would that he were not my kindred!"

"What do you mean?"

"That the scoundrel is my father!"

"Impossible!"

"Not so."

"But your name is Frank Trafton!"

"It is Francis Trafton Cartwright, and I am the son of a murderer!"

He seemed about to faint, and Nat sprang forward to assist him.

With a strange cry he repelled the young man, and summoning all his strength, rushed out of the cabin and upon deck.

CHAPTER XIV.

FRANK MAKES A REVELATION.

NAT ran upon deck, and found Frank standing by the rail of the stranded ship, gazing out upon the dreary landscape.

"What is the matter, old fellow?" he asked, soothingly, for he had taken a great fancy to the lad, and did not like to see him in distress.

"Nothing now," answered Frank; "I felt faint, but that has past away since I came out here."

"You say you are the son of that vil—of Mr. Cartwright?"

"Yes, you hate me for it; I am sure you despise, and——"

"No, no, Frank, I don't; I like you better than any boy I ever knew. It is not your fault that you are the son of this man. Believe me, I have no wish to visit the sins of the father upon his child."

"Did you know all, you might."

"Know all—what do you mean?"

"I was charged by my father to compass your death, and I promised to do it."

Nat retreated a pace or so, not in fear, but from surprise.

"You promised this?" he said.

"Yes, but then I did not know you, did not love you as I do now. Believe me, I would protect you now with my last drop of blood!"

The boy's voice was as tender and soft as a woman's, and his large expressive eyes were ready to overflow with tears.

"And you promised your father that you would take my life?"

"Yes, but I will not keep it, for now I know what a monster he is. Let him beware, if ever we meet again!"

"Why should he wish to have me killed?"

"It is a long story."

"Will you not tell it?"

"Yes, but no one else must hear the recital. You have a right to know what to be prepared for, but I dare not confide the story to any one else."

"It is not nearly as cold as it was; suppose we take a walk across the ice, we can easily find our way back, for we will not go far."

"Very well, but you had better tell the others, or they may be alarmed at our absence."

Nat went to the cabin door, which had been repaired so as to keep out the cold, and shouted down:

"I say, Job, you and Chucks get dinner. Frank and I are going off to reconnoiter."

"Dinner!" repeated Chucks, in mock rapture; "ha, ha, how fine that sounds. Yes, my noble captain, we will get you a dinner worthy of a king."

"See that you do."

"We'll have roast chicken and boiled onions, hard tack and pickles, and end up with a plum pudding and wine sauce."

"Where on earth are you going to get all that?" asked Frank, smiling down at Chucks from over Nat's shoulder.

"From the supplies, to be sure. We will give you a good Polar bear soup also, if you want it. I am the cook of this establishment, understand. I don't mind being Nat's captain, but I'm going to have the next position of importance, and everybody knows that's the cook."

Frank laughed, and then inquired:

"But the plum pudding! Where is that coming from?"

"From the flour barrel, to be sure, and the fruit jars, and the brandy bottles. I said wine sauce, but brandy is just as good. You won't get much, mind you, for that brandy has got to last us. There's no better medicine, be you in a hot or a cold climate, than good brandy."

"You are quite a genius, Chucks," remarked Nat, with a good-natured laugh. "There is no danger of your starving."

"Well, I should say not—with provisions enough to last fifty men five years. Try your arithmetic on that, my patient Job, and see how you come out."

"Oh, you clear out and go to your pots and kettles, old slush bucket. I think I made a mistake in that last reckonin' I made. The sun has gone fur six months, an' I shall have to overhaul my figgers."

"Take care of yourselves," said Nat, and, banging the door shut, he and Frank made their way down and started off together across the ice.

The solitary guardian of their ice bound vessel could be seen at a great distance, and there was no danger of their getting lost as long as they kept him in sight.

"My father still watches over me," observed Nat, turning round to look at the figure, "and I cannot but feel that this block of ice, which is all that remains of him, will be of more protection than I imagine."

"How cheerful that smoke looks, pouring out from the pipe," said Frank, pausing to gaze at their lonely dwelling. "It gives an air of home to the place which it did not have when we first found it."

"So it is our home, my lad, and here shall we dwell harmoniously until the spring."

"You believe in the open sea at the Pole?"

"I do. This spot we are on now is doubtless a belt of ice which never breaks up, from some cause unknown to us, and beyond a doubt we have discovered what has hitherto only been guessed at, the region of everlasting cold."

"The frozen sentinel upon the prow of the Adventurer attests to that fact. The edge of this belt, however, must be affected by change."

"Undoubtedly, but the ice has, in these years, so far forced the ship, that now it is beyond the limit affected by the change of seasons."

"It is most remarkable."

"Indeed it is. What say you to a smart run, to warm our blood and put new life into us?"

"All right. I'll beat you to yonder round-topped clump; the path here is quite smooth!"

Away scudded the two boys over the crisp snow, their merry laughter ringing upon the air and awakening the echoes which doubtless had never before heard the welcome sound.

Frank reached the goal first, and, standing upon the highest point, threw snowballs at Nat as he came up.

Our hero scrambled up to the top of the knoll, and then when both were seated, Nat with his arm around Frank to keep him from falling, he said:

"Now, then, my boy, let me hear your story, and be assured that, no matter what others may have tried to have you do, I know your real feeling toward me."

"You do not think I would try to harm you in the least?"

"No."

"Nor speak any ill word against you?"

"No."

"Nor do anything but assist and defend you?"

"No, for you are one of my truest friends, and one whom I would trust in this wild spot as much as I would Job himself."

"Thank you, Nat. I like to hear you say that, for I had feared they would tell you differently. I would rather die than see you harmed, and I know now that if this man Cartwright, my father though he is, should chance to come here, and should attempt to do you any injury, I should be tempted to kill him."

"I trust that there will be no occasion for any such violence, Frank, and I have no idea that we shall ever see the man again."

"The first time I heard anything about Captain Evans," began

Frank, "was about four years ago, when my father used frequently to talk about his Arctic explorations. He ridiculed the man, and said that the North Pole would never be found; that it was impossible, and that people might as well give up the idea at once."

"When I discovered afterwards that he had sailed with this same Captain Evans, I thought it very strange, and could not account for the change. However, I presumed that he had been made a good offer, and on that account had consented to lay aside his prejudices."

"The preceding voyage had not been a good one, and he had lost considerable money, as had many other whalers. As he now had a certainty, I did not doubt that he was perfectly willing to change his views and do for money what he had before ridiculed, set out to find the North Pole."

"When I next saw him, he said that Evans was probably dead, that their vessel had been caught in the ice, and that he, at the head of a party sent to find relief, had been captured by Indians."

"He had spent the winter with them, he said, and had then been rescued by a party of his own countrymen, after which he had sailed for home."

"Only three or four of his comrades had escaped, and he told a pitiful story of the cruel hardships he and they had suffered in the frozen regions of the north."

"He did not seem altogether satisfied in his mind that his old captain was dead; and I often fancied that he meant to go north and ascertain. He said that they had been separated, and that maybe Evans was still safe, as such things had been known as men passing the severe northern winter in safety and resuming their voyages in the spring."

"Time passed, and people generally seemed to forget the Arctic explorer, though Cartwright did not, and talked of him constantly. When he agreed to go on the voyage with Captain Hathaway, he told me that I was to go as cabin-boy, he having made all arrangements."

"That young Nat Evans will be aboard, Frank," he said, "and I want you to look out for him. His father ruined me, and this young cub will try and do the same."

"I was astonished and asked what he meant, being informed in reply that Evans had plotted against him, had maligned his character and caused not only his financial ruin, but had made it impossible for him to hold up his head in good society."

"He has dishonored me, and his son stands where you ought to be," he continued. "Only blood can wipe out the offense, and if you are a true child of mine you will kill this brat of his at the first opportunity."

"I was dreadfully excited, for he told me of a long list of wrongs committed against him by Captain Evans, whom I had not supposed he had known previous to that last fatal voyage. Scarcely knowing what I did, in my frenzy, for I believed him then, I swore to do his bidding, to worm myself into your confidence, so that you should have no suspicion of my purpose, and then, on some dark night, throw or push you overboard."

"You repented having promised to do this, when you got to knowing me, didn't you, Frank?"

"Indeed I did. Spite of myself, I grew so fond of you that had the man pressed the matter I should have disclosed the whole affair. I caught him in several lies, and that made me think that the story he had told me might be nothing but one long falsehood."

"I was known as Frank Trafton, and no one supposed me to be his son, the captain even having been told that I was merely a boy that the mate knew and wanted to befriend. From hating you, as I had done, after hearing his story, I began to hate him instead, and swore that nothing should harm you."

"He probably fears you, because he imagines that you may somehow learn of his treachery to your father, and that is why he wishes you out of the way. He is a villain, and I hope we may never meet again, for I disown him, and will denounce him for his villainy. You are my best friend, Nat, and I will stand by you until the last."

"I know it, my lad; and now suppose we go back to the ship."

CHAPTER XV.

A CHAPTER UPON THE ROUTINE OF ARCTIC LIFE.

The dinner prepared by Chucks that day was particularly good, and was eaten with a relish, the merry fellow outdoing himself in providing fun for all hands.

The plum-pudding was pronounced a decided success, and Chucks was advised to try it again on some other festive occasion, his companions promising that they would do it full justice.

"I've been overhauling my figgers, Nat," said Job, when the table was cleared, "and I find that I have made a slight mistake."

"How much do you make it now?"

"Something under eighty-six, and allowin' for the magnetic variation, it'll be fully that, and perhaps a little more. By dead reckoning, I didn't seem to be able to get it up as high as that, but I cal'late that when we were drifting we went a mighty sight faster than you or I had any notion of."

"The currents here are very strong, Job, as we could see by the rapidity with which those huge masses of ice were moving. What I am afraid of now is that this belt of ice never breaks up, and that even if we managed to build a smaller vessel out of this one, we could not get it afloat."

"We can travel on sledges."

"But the dogs? We are beyond the limit of human habitation, and there is not one chance in a thousand that any Inuits, or Esquimaux, as the Indians derisively term them, will come this way."

"If they do, we'll have to look out," interrupted Chucks. "They are peaceful enough and perfectly harmless when there's only one o' them to a dozen of you, but when the proportion is turned around, it isn't so funny."

"Chucks is right," remarked Job, after a slight pause, "and if they should appear in any force, we'd kind o' have to look out for ourselves. These cusses ain't so harmless and good-natured as they look. Any man what will eat raw meat has got to be watched, for he'll dig open graves, and even go back on his mother."

For the next four or five days the ice-bound comrades were busily occupied in making their winter home more thoroughly comfortable even than it was already, although there had as yet been no cause for complaint.

Strong double doors were fitted to the cabin, these being lined on the inside with thick felting; all cracks were tightly calked, the berths provided with extra bulwarks, new mattresses and plenty of furs, two extra stoves put up and kept constantly going, and everything else done which forethought could suggest.

Nat insisted that all hands should take a cold-water bath every morning and run not less than a mile over the ice and back again at least once each day, both of which requirements were complied with.

Each person had his separate apartment, there being room enough in the after part of the vessel for that, and each room was provided with all the conveniences desirable.

Frank always locked his room door upon retiring, but he was always up the first one in the morning, and the splashing caused by his invariable morning bath was the signal for Chucks to arise and see to getting breakfast.

Before doing this, however, he would go into the storeroom and take his own bath, an operation that was accompanied by sundry howlings as the cold water trickled down his fat sides, for Chucks would have much preferred warm water, Nat's positive commands to the contrary being the only thing that prevented him from following out his inclinations.

Job had many a laugh at Chucks on this account, and would frequently come upon him while he was taking his bath and dash an extra dipperful of the icy fluid down his back, accompanying the act with a guffaw that threatened to raise the hatches.

Frank, however, was never present upon these occasions, and never left his room until breakfast was announced, whether from modesty or a natural disinclination, it could not be said.

He was an uncommon boy in many particulars, was Frank, and several of his ways were much more feminine than common, even with boys who have no other companions than their mothers and sisters.

He was strongly liked, however, and there was not one of the party who would not have made almost any sacrifice for his sake.

He had been a favorite on board the ship, and his ready wit, active habits, cheerful compliance with all rules and thorough willingness to help in everything that was done, made him so, these characteristics being as strongly marked when in their new home as while upon the whaling bark.

Regularity was the controlling force in the life of the castaways,

and everything was done as if by clockwork, Nat maintaining that this was the only way by which they could hope to retain their health and happiness.

The hours for meals were always the same, the times for recreation, exercise, social intercourse and for retiring and arising were never varied, and all that was done was conducted so regularly that it would seem as if the whole domestic economy of the place was run by clockwork. This system, far from being irksome, was found decidedly pleasant, because it prevented the time from dragging, and filled every moment pleasantly and profitably, and made all hands contented.

At night, or rather from seven to ten o'clock in the evening, the entire day being a sort of twilight, all four gathered about the table in the main cabin, and Nat or Frank read some entertaining book of travels, or maybe a chapter or so of a scientific work, and then all hands discussed the same.

Nat made rapid progress in the study of navigation, and Frank kept close behind, being as much interested as his friend.

Occasionally Chucks would tell some comical story, and the evenings always seemed too short, ten o'clock arriving frequently before any one had any idea that it was so late.

At that hour Nat peremptorily sent everybody to bed, and silence reigned throughout the ship, not a sound being heard before five o'clock the next morning, which was the hour for arising, and which never varied.

Breakfast came at seven o'clock, dinner at half-past twelve and supper at six, the time never changing half a minute, Chucks being regular enough when he had Nat to look after him.

The hardest work was usually done in the forenoon, while the time between dinner and supper was devoted to study, recreation, exercise and such other occupations as best suited the particular members of the little party.

Frank had great sport in challenging Chucks to run races with him across the ice, the fat fellow always accepting them and creating no end of amusement by his comical movements.

He did not run, he waddled, and when he fell, as he did twice in every heat, his own laugh was the loudest, his merriment appearing to be as genuine as though somebody else had been the victim.

"Never you mind, little fellow," he would say to Frank, "I can beat you in a swimming match, and I'll bet you a pair of sealskin boots, with mud soles, like what the Esquimaux wear, I can do it and give you ten rods start in half a mile."

"That's a safe enough bet, Chucks," said Nat, laughing, "for there's no present chance of your finding water enough to swim in. Keep it in mind, though, Frank, and you may win those boots yet."

"I don't swim," answered the lad, quietly.

"No; that's too bad. You must learn; for no true sailor boy should be lacking in that most necessary accomplishment."

"I never had the opportunity for learning that boys usually have. I guess I was brought up differently from most lads."

"Whether you were or not, you're a darned sight better than lots of 'em," said Job. "They're so sassy that ye can't do anything with 'em."

Two weeks more passed away, and the ship was as comfortable as heart could wish, the inmates were healthy, happy, and perfectly contented, being well able to endure the cold weather, and having so much to do that they never thought of being blue, or of being anything but the most harmonious of mortals.

They had seen neither men nor animals since their arrival, and the solemn silence was never broken, save by their own cheerful voices.

All this, however, was to be changed, and their quiet, happy life was to be broken in upon by a harsh, discordant element which they would have done much to keep out.

CHAPTER XVI.

A CRY IN THE NIGHT—AN UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL.

NOVEMBER came in, and now the night was perpetual, the aurora being the only thing which served to break the monotony of the long darkness.

The snow continued to fall at intervals, and occasionally it was found necessary to dig a passage through it from the cabin doors to the ship's rail.

The doors had been made to open inward, and as there were two sets, whatever snow might have drifted past the first was prevented

from going any further by the second, the outer ones serving the same purpose as storm doors in our city houses.

The deck of the vessel was covered to a considerable depth with the snow, and fearing lest it might be crushed in by the weight, Nat and his companions shoveled away the extra quantities which had fallen since their arrival, throwing it over the side and building a regular inclined roadway down to the ice.

There were plenty snow-shovels in the hold, and all hands enjoyed the invigorating exercise of working in the snow, their hands and faces being well protected from the cold.

Occasionally a snow-ball match would take place between Frank and Chucks, who afforded the fun for the whole party, and Nat thought he had never seen anything so comical as the rosy fellow's attempts to dodge the missiles thrown by Frank's unerring hand, Job sometimes sending in a couple from an unexpected quarter.

At such times, Chucks would turn to see where this new enemy was, and then Frank would get in an extra volley, causing his opponent to beat a hasty retreat, sometimes falling head first into the drift and obliging his comrades to come to his rescue.

As the time wore on and the middle of the month of November approached, the cold seemed to increase in intensity, and nothing but the most energetic exercise, when out of doors, could keep our friends from suffering acutely.

Nat insisted, and very properly too, that a part of each day should be spent in the open air, as that was the only thing that would inure them to the cold and prevent fatal consequences.

Of course, when the thermometer was down to forty or fifty below the zero mark, it would not be safe to remain long exposed to the outer air, but a brisk run of a few minutes was a good tonic and would do them good.

The supply chests were overhauled, and the warmest clothing brought out and thoroughly aired, so that no dampness should cling to it, after which our party proceeded to make use of whatever they required.

The warmest under-garments were not those which were the heaviest, but the closest fitting and fleece-lined, glove-fitting shirts and drawers, worn under the ordinary Mackinaw articles, were found to afford the most comfort.

Over these again were drawn a woolen vest and trousers, and then the thick double-lined fur garments, made in one piece with hoods and separable mittens, sealskin boots, such as the natives wear, and this completed the ordinary dress of our four friends.

Frank occasionally wore the poor captain's great fur-lined coat and an extra hood with a high conical peak to it, in which attire he looked like a merry specimen of some curious tribe of animals, half bear and half human.

"You look like a ghost in bearskins," laughed Chucks, the coat and hood being of white fur, "and if I didn't know you, I think I should be almost scared."

"Nobody who knows and loves him, need be afraid of our little Frank," said Nat, tenderly. "It is not every boy who could endure what we have."

"I couldn't do it if you were not here, Nat," answered Frank, taking his comrade's hand. "It is you that make me brave and strong, and fit to stand all sorts of trouble. What a magnificent aurora that is. It seems to glow like fire."

"And that just puts me in mind that our own fires will need stirring up," said Chucks, the whole party having come out on deck after supper, one evening about the middle of the month, to view the scene and get a little exercise before spending their usual pleasant evening about the cabin table.

"Is that a sign of colder weather?"

"Yes, Master Frank, it is. I'll bet they can see that aurora clean down to New York. Golly! but ain't it bright? You can see to read by it, and the colors are as pretty as——"

"Hark!" said Frank, suddenly, in an impressive tone.

"What's the matter?" asked Nat.

"I hear someone calling."

Our hero looked at the boy in alarm.

"We had better go below," he said quietly, "the cold is increasing."

"No, no, Nat, my mind is not wandering," said Frank, hastily, patting his hand on Nat's arm and detaining him. "There, there!" he cried excitedly; "do you not hear it?"

"Blowed if I don't hear something myself," said Job, "but it might be the wind."

"No, no, it is not the wind, it is the voice of a man calling, either to us or to someone else."

"Can you see them?"

"No; for yonder mass of snow and ice seems to be in the way. The sound comes from there."

There was a silence for several minutes, not a word being spoken, but every ear strained to hear the repetition of the sound which, as yet, Frank alone had heard.

"Halloo! Hal-loo! Hal-l-oo!"

Now they all hear it, and gaze in each other's faces with the greatest excitement.

"Halloo, halloo, halloo!"

This time it sounds nearer, the high-strung, long-drawn notes being most peculiarly adapted to being heard at a great distance.

"You do not think I am dreaming now, do you?" asked Frank.

"No, my lad, this is a reality. There is someone hailing us, beyond a doubt. Can they see us?"

"They may see the ship or the frozen figure on the bowsprit. You know that we saw that a long way off."

"They will not take it for a man."

"No; but if they do see it, they evidently imagine that there are human beings in the neighborhood."

"They may see the smoke from our fires."

"Very likely."

"What are you going to do?" asked Job, suddenly.

"In what event?"

"Supposin' those fellows is whites, and haven't got no place to stay!"

"The hold of our vessel is large enough to contain many more yet. I could not refuse a home to any one."

"There it is again," said Chucks, "and there's someone answering them. Hold on! what do you make out of that other sound? I'll tell you, it's a pack of snarling Spitz dogs."

"Then there is a party of Esquimaux in sledges," said Frank, hastily. "The ice below here is now smooth enough, on account of the snow, for them to travel over. They will be here shortly."

"Go below, then, every man," said Nat. "Let us hope they may not see us. These wretches are capable of any treachery where they outnumber the whites. If they do find us out we can defend ourselves."

They all hurried below, the outer and inner doors being both securely fastened with heavy bars that had been made for the purpose.

"Now, let us consider," said the young leader, when they had all gathered below. "If they attack us what means of defense have we?"

"I have got that big brass bomb-gun," said Chucks, "and I reckon I can give 'em a surprise party with it."

"I've got an ax," added Frank.

"So have I, and Job has his harpoon. They can't break in, and if they do we will give them a warm reception."

"They might try to put our fires out," said Job.

"How so?"

"By chucking snow down the pipes. I don't believe in letting them besiege us. If they do come aboard, of course they'll know we're here. Then we'd better just show ourselves and give 'em to understand that they ain't wanted."

"There may be white men in the party," suggested Frank.

"If there are, then, as Nat says, we'll let 'em stay here if they want to, but we don't care to have any dirty, raw-meat eaters, with their greasy chops, a foolin' around us."

"Suppose we sit down quietly, as we would under any other circumstances," said Nat, "and not worry until we actually hear them."

This was done, and an hour passed away very pleasantly, Frank reading aloud and the others making an occasional remark concerning the book he read.

They had well-nigh forgotten their cause of alarm, when there suddenly came a pounding at the outer doors, and a voice was heard saying:

"If you are honest men within this ship, open your doors to a poor traveler!"

Nat sprang up, crossed the cabin, ascended the steps, and before letting down the bar, asked:

"How many are you?"

"Two, both whites. Let us in, for the love of Heaven; we are well-nigh exhausted."

Nat's friends had gathered below him upon the steps, and he now opened the door, the light from the cabin showing him the forms of two men standing outside.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed.

"North Pole Nat, as I'm a sinner," said the foremost of the men.

"Mr. Cartwright!" gasped Nat. "I thought you had perished. This is an unexpected meeting, sir; but you can never tell what may happen in these regions."

CHAPTER XVII.

CARTWRIGHT TELLS HIS STORY AND RECEIVES A WARNING.

It was indeed a fact that Cartwright, the mate of the Arctic Fox, stood before Nat and his companions.

"Well, you did get ashore, didn't you?" he asked. "Where is the old man?"

"Drowned!"

"Well, I've had a hard blow of it myself," muttered the man. "You look comfortable down there; won't you let me in?"

"I could not refuse a dog shelter in such a night as this. Come in, Mr. Cartwright; I won't say, and welcome, for that would not be the truth."

"What d'ye mean, lad?" growled the man, turning red in the face.

"I do not need to explain when you shall know the name of this ship, and whose body that is outside, all snow and ice."

"I don't understand."

"Then never mind, but come in, for you are letting the cold air in. Who have you with you? Mr. Jones? Ah, I see; any one else?"

"No."

"Then come in," and Nat, after admitting them, barred the door securely and led the way to the cabin, which, with its cheerful fires and general air of comfort and coziness, was a welcome contrast to the bleak solitudes without.

"If you are very cold, you had better not go too near the fires at first, sir," said Nat, warningly; "the change will be too sudden."

Cartwright sat upon a locker against the further side of the cabin, and kicking off his heavy boots, removed his hood, mittens and thick outer garments, Jones doing the same.

"Have you anything to drink that'll do a fellow good?" he then asked.

"Yes, certainly. Chucks, bring out some of that coffee from the pantry and set it on the stove."

"Haven't you got anything better than that? Ain't there any brandy in the stores? No good Arctic man ever sails without brandy."

"We have some, but I don't think you need it. You have not frozen any part of you?"

"No, but I thought a good horn of brandy would go good, that's all. Coffee won't hurt me as I know of."

"Indeed not. You must allow me to prescribe for you, while you are my guest."

Both men took copious draughts of the hot coffee, and then Cartwright first addressed Frank, though he had seen him upon entering.

"Hallo, Frank, you're alive, are you? I was sorry they let you go in the boat, and if I'd 've known it, you wouldn't 've. It's all right now, though," giving the lad a peculiar side glance, which the boy understood only too well.

"I have been with friends, sir, and have suffered for nothing," returned the lad, quietly.

"That's more than I can say for them, for of all that were in the vessel, only me and Jones are left. We got caught in the ice, were smashed by an iceberg, and starting on foot across country, half of our party were frozen to death, some died, and the rest—, well, I don't know what became of them."

"How did you happen to miss us?" asked Nat.

"The shipkeeper signaled us to come back, as the whale had gone down and night was coming on."

"We were fast, and the whale never sank until after we were obliged to cut loose, the captain having been entangled in the line and drawn overboard."

"We didn't see you, and as the shipkeeper had signaled we went back. After that we kept on for awhile, and then the clouds set

in all around us and it began to snow. We hung about all night, and before morning the ice closed in on us so thick that we couldn't get out. Then an iceberg fell on us and stove the ship to pieces."

"Did you look for us in the morning?" asked Job, who did not altogether believe the plausible tale told by the mate.

"Yes, but we had a good deal to look out for ourselves. Wright was dead, and half the men were so badly hurt that they could not work. Some had been killed when the iceberg fell, and some were sick. We got together all our party and encamped on the ice for a day, and then set out to reach shore.

"The sun was hidden and we couldn't tell which way to go, having lost our ship's and boat compasses. We made a start at last, and traveled for several days, the men dropping off one by one from exhaustion and the bitter cold.

"Tom Bunt, stroke oar of Mr. Jones' boat and one or two others of the older seamen were the first to go, and we buried them in the ice so the wolves wouldn't get at them, for they began to annoy us greatly, and hung on our tracks day and night.

"We had managed to save some provisions and three or four casks of water, and we shot a polar bear, so that we were well off for food. We rigged a shelter at night and slept tolerably comfortable, but the terrible weather was picking us off one by one, and we prayed constantly for shelter."

"Golly, I guess you didn't pray much!" said Chucks, suddenly. "Perhaps you wished for it, but I'll bet a pair of sealskin boots that you didn't pray a great deal. It isn't your way of doing things."

"None of your impudence, you fat lubber, or I'll knock your teeth down your greasy throat."

"No you don't. You ain't on the Arctic Fox now, and you don't stand for more'n a passenger on this ship while I'm cook, so you better keep quiet about knocking people's teeth out."

"Be quiet, Chucks," said Nat. "Mr. Cartwright, I beg you will pay no attention to our comrade's jokes. You ought to know well enough by this time that he means no offense."

Cartwright did not seem very well pleased at Nat's taking the man's part, and he glared savagely at Chucks, the latter grinning tauntingly at him, by way of reply, and then seeing that there was nothing to be gained by getting angry, he resumed his story, part of which was true and part false.

"As I was saying," he continued, "we were in the worst way for the want of a shelter, and I believe more men died just on that account than there would otherwise. At last, after a week or more of traveling we came upon an Esquimau village and there we were made comfortable.

"We had plenty to eat and a warm place to sleep at night. I was satisfied to stay there all winter, but the men wanted to push ahead, and so, after staying in the igloos for several days, the Esquimaux furnished us with sledges and dogs, and off we started for the north."

"For the north?" cried Nat. "You surely could not hope to find shelter and friends in the north while the winter lasted?"

"The Esquimaux told us of a ship away up in towards the Pole, in a region where the ice never melts, which had been abandoned and which would afford us a home for the winter. They had seen it they said, for it had been there many years, and they were sure we would find it a good home. Hence, we went north, and after a long search, found the ship, though we did not suppose there would be anybody aboard of her, and above all, so cozily settled."

"You did not know what the vessel was?"

"No."

All four of the comrades exchanged silent glances, and the villain began to feel very uneasy.

"And your journey here, was it a hard one?" asked Nat.

"Yes. What didn't die were either taken prisoners by the treacherous Esquimaux or wandered off, half crazy, and were lost or died from exposure, I don't know which. Ed Lewis, the shipkeeper, was with us, but he strayed away, and I never knew what became of him.

"Finally, our dogs ran away with the sledges and provisions and everything, and left us to make the rest of the journey on foot. That was four days ago, and since then we have scarcely tasted food or drink, and when we came across the ship were almost too worn out to climb up the side and knock for admission. The sight of the smoke coming out of them pipes just did our hearts good."

"Chucks, bring out some cold meat and bread, and put over a pot

"I coffee to boil," said Nat; and as the jolly cook bestirred himself, he continued, addressing Cartwright:

"To such care and attention as you need in your present plight, and which we can give, you have a right, but do not expect more than that. You must be perfectly well aware what this ship is; but to be more explicit, I will tell you. She is called the Adventurer."

"Indeed! I suppose you found her logs, or something which gave you that information?"

"Did you never hear of her before?" asked Job.

"Not that I know of. Was she a whaler?"

"She was an Arctic exploring vessel, commanded by one Nathan Evans, of New York—my father. Did you ever know him?"

"I have heard of him," replied Cartwright, carelessly, "but I can't say as I ever had the pleasure of his acquaintance."

"There is no need of you telling any more falsehoods, Mr. Cartwright, for I am aware of the whole truth of this matter," said Nat, firmly. "I know that you were the mate of this vessel, that you abandoned my father and his comrades to a dreadful fate; that you mothered those six sailors in their beds and——"

"It's a lie!" yelled Cartwright, with a remarkable degree of energy for a starving man, springing from the table. "They smothered themselves. Nat Evans was a fool to go so far north anyhow, and I warned him more than once."

"I am acquainted with the whole history of the case, sir, and you can tell me nothing. Why you have returned to this ship I cannot say, unless for shelter, as you affirm. That you can have, but understand plainly, you are here only from sufferance, and because I would not treat you as you treated your old captain. I have some kindness for me and I wish to see no one suffer. You may stay here until spring, but no later. Whatever you need you shall have, but understand me—I know you and all your plans! Beware then, how you seek to carry them out!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

NAT ON HIS GUARD—A MIDNIGHT VISITOR.

NAT spoke these words quietly but firmly, and the man to whom they were addressed could not but understand their full meaning.

He saw that it would be useless to get mad or bluster, so he said nothing, merely sitting in silence, with his head between his hands.

Frank, who had all this time been strangely agitated, now crossed over to where Nat stood, and putting his hand within that of the latter, gave it a warm pressure.

Nat looked down upon the handsome, girlish face of the boy, and putting an arm about him, whispered:

"Cheer up, old fellow, you'll always find me at the helm on this ship, and there isn't anything going to harm you."

"You believe me your friend, now and always?"

"I never doubted it, my lad. No one, with your face, could prove false. You're as good as gold, Frank, and as trusty as steel."

"God grant I may ever prove so. Let me say one thing more. Nat, come into the other cabin."

When they were outside, where there was no danger of their being heard, Nat said:

"Well, Frank, what is it?"

"Beware of that man, and of his comrade. I believe he lied when he told you that story. He will try to do you an injury; watch him day and night. I will do the same, and so will we all. Don't leave him alone in the ship at any time, and at night lock the cabin doors and put the key in your pocket."

"You've a wise head on your shoulders, Frank. Why do you distrust the man so much?"

"Why? You know why as well as I. Because I hate him, because he is a villain, because I love you and would shield you from every harm. Fool that I was to make such a fiendish promise to him! All that remains is to show you how I repent that act, and to show this man, too, if he continues his evil course, that I despise and defy him, and will bring him to punishment for his crimes."

"Let us go inside, they will miss us, though I do not care if I arouse the man's suspicions, as he must be now aware that I thoroughly know him."

They returned to the cabin, where Chucks had just set the fragrant coffee upon the table, flanked by a large plate of meat and cold biscuits, for the flour in the storeroom was in good condition, and Chucks knew how to make excellent bread.

"Now, sirs, set to and help yourselves," said Nat. "We have had our suppers, so you'll excuse us. As you are worn out with your long tramp, you may want to go to bed early; so when you're ready, Chucks will show you where you are to sleep. We keep regular hours here, and nobody sits up after ten. That's the regulation."

"You don't run things man-of-war style up here in the ice, do you?" asked Jones.

"Yes, sir. Discipline is the salvation of the community. We do everything here by clockwork, and all goes as smoothly as a fine machine. There is a time for everything, and everything is done in its time. No one thinks of breaking the rules, and therefore they are not arduous. You will be expected to do like the rest of us, for uniformity is our only safety."

"I don't see the use of being so strict where you're all on an equality," said Jones, swallowing a huge mouthful of hot coffee.

"I am not strict, and you won't find a happier set of fellows anywhere than us four. In these bitterly cold regions, however, and particularly in our situation, shut off from the world as we are, we have got to be systematic and regular in everything we do. If not, what follows? Sickness, division, unhappiness, discontent and everything else that is bad."

"Perhaps you are right. Anyhow, I ain't going to quarrel with my bread and butter, as the feller says. Well, mate, have ye stored in enough," the man continued, turning to Cartwright.

"Yes, and it's the best feed I've had in six months. Well, Nat, as you seem to be captain here, just show us where our bunks is and I reckon we'll turn in, for we are about done out. What time do you call the watch in the morning?"

"Five o'clock. You'll find water for your baths in your rooms. You can take a run across the snow when you get dressed, and be back to breakfast at seven."

"Is a cold bath one of the regulations?"

"You ought to know that, being an old Arctic man."

"Well, well," laughed the other, "you have got it down fine, and no mistake. I'm ready now, are you, Jones?"

"Reckon I am."

"Chucks, show them their rooms. In the steerage, the first two rooms on the right. You aired the bedding as I told you?"

"I did, captain."

"That's all right. Gentlemen, the steward will show you your rooms. Rise at five, remember, though considering your tedious journey, you need not trouble yourselves for the first morning or so to get up so early."

Chucks led the way to the rooms, which had formerly been the quarters of the under officers, and contained two bunks apiece, and showing them inside, went away.

They did not like being put into two rooms, as they wanted to talk together and plan for the future, but Nat, foreseeing this very thing, had separated them.

After the two unwelcome guests had retired, the others enjoyed an hour or so of pleasant conversation and instructive reading, Job and Chucks indulging in a quiet smoke.

The party was an utterly harmonious one, and these reunions at the end of the day were exceedingly pleasant and enjoyable, sociability being about as good a tonic as one can have.

The chronometer at last marked ten o'clock, and Nat, arising from his seat, said:

"Bed-time, boys. Be off with you, and if any of you hear any suspicious noises in the night, report to headquarters!"

They then went off separately to bed, Nat remembering Frank's caution, and locking up everything securely, not only the outer doors, but the store-room, fore-castle, and inner cabin door as well, putting the keys in his pocket.

The door which he and Job had made at the head of the companion-way had been fitted with a staple and padlock, but they had never been fastened, otherwise than with the heavy bar, since they were put up.

Now, however, Nat was glad that the padlock had been added, and he locked it with a deep feeling of satisfaction, which was all the greater, a few hours later, as the sequel will show.

The door from the cabin to the steerage was not locked, but left open to secure a free passage of air, and after Nat had made all his other preparations, he retired to his room, and locking himself in, was soon buried in sleep.

Two hours or so had passed, he did not know exactly how long it was, when he suddenly awoke with a strange feeling upon him.

He had thought he heard a rattling sound, as of someone trying to enter the cabin, and then a noise like the pounding upon a door.

It was not the wind, he was sure of that, for the doors were too firmly fixed to be affected by any but a regular gale, nor was it the howling of the storm outside.

He was now fully awake, and the sound being repeated, he knew that he had not been dreaming.

With a vague foreboding at his heart, he arose hastily, drew on a portion of his clothing, and unlocking his door carefully, crept noiselessly along the main cabin toward the companionway, taking an ax from its fastening as he went.

Suddenly, as he crouched in the dim light of the place, for one lamp was always kept burning, he heard a voice just outside the door stationed at the foot of the steps leading to the deck.

The door was slightly ajar, and peering through he saw the figure of a man at the top of the steps, evidently talking with someone on the outside. The man was Cartwright, the treacherous mate!

"H'st, Ned! the plaguy boy has put a padlock on the door, and I can't let you in."

"You must. I will freeze to death out here!"

The voice was that of Ed Lewis, the shipkeeper of the Arctic Fox, whom Cartwright had reported as dead or missing.

Truly, there was some deep mystery here, the key to which might unfathom some deep and dangerous plot.

CHAPTER XIX.

CARTWRIGHT MAKES TROUBLE—AN INEXORABLE DECISION.

"I TELL you I can't," repeated the mate.

"Can't you break the lock?"

"It would make too much noise."

"Steal the key out of his pocket."

"He sleeps with his door locked."

"Then wake him up on some pretense, and take it away from him. If he cuts up, go for him."

"Can't be done; he's too sharp."

"I can't stay out here all night."

"You're under the lee of the ship, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"And got the sledges and lots of bearskins and a dozen greasy Esquimaux to lie between, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Then what are you growling about?"

"I want to come inside. It's a deuced sight pleasanter in there than out here."

"I know that; but the blasted young cuss is awfully suspicious, and I think Frank has gone back on me, too."

"Kill the young skunk!"

"I will, the first chance I get."

A perfect flood of revelations had been made during the few minutes occupied by that conversation.

The shipkeeper and a dozen Esquimaux outside, with dogs and sledges; Cartwright swearing to kill his own son; some plan on foot to put Nat out of the way. These and a dozen other things suggested, if not plainly told, the position might well be called a critical one.

Nat determined to put an end to the parley at once.

Throwing open the door, he cried:

"Mr. Cartwright, I think it about time you went back to bed."

The man was perfectly thunderstruck, for he had no idea but what Nat was fast asleep, dreaming the dreams of the just.

He turned around suddenly and glared at the lad as if he would kill him with a look.

"Mind your business, you young cub, and go to bed. I shall do as I please aboard this ship!"

"Excuse me, you will do as I please. Go back to your room, sir, and any further disobedience upon your part will put you in irons."

"H'm, you speak big, don't you?"

"No bigger than I act."

"You think you're captain, don't you?"

"I am!"

This simple but emphatic sentence was spoken with a vim that left no room for doubting that the young man would prove himself to be just what he said he was.

"Hold on, Ned," said the scoundrel; "I've got a young fighting-cock here what I'm going to lick, and then I'll let you in."

He came down the stairs, and Nat retreated, not from fear, but in order to gain an advantage over the wretch.

Cartwright came rushing down the stairs and into the cabin, and then Nat, slamming the doors, and standing with his back braced against them, raised his ax in a threatening attitude.

"Now back to your room and stay there!" commanded the brave boy.

"I won't do it. Put down that ax, and give me the key."

"Do as I tell you."

"I won't."

He made a dash at Nat, but the boy brandished his ax in altogether too careless a fashion to suit him, and he soon got out of the way of its sharp edge.

"Hallo, here, Jones!" he yelled; "come out here and help me tame this young cub; he's getting too frisky to live, and needs lashing."

Quickly fastening the bar in its place over the door, Nat left his station, and, forcing the scoundrel away from the door leading to the steerage, he closed it and then stood against it.

"Now, my friend, as you won't go for the asking, we shall have to force you," said Nat, determinedly. "Hallo, Job, Frank, Chucks, come out here."

Job had already heard the disturbance, and fancying that all was not right, had arisen and began to dress himself; so when he heard Nat's summons, he hastily completed his arrangements and came out, followed in half a minute by Frank.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

Nat told him, giving him a full but concise account of the conversation with the man outside, and of Cartwright's refusal to go back to his room.

"Look here, sir," said the veteran harpooner, gravely. "The discipline of this place has got to be maintained. Nat is captain here, and what he says is law. You're a traitor, and we only took you in here because we pitied you. If you're going to upset all our rules you've got to get out. If you don't go back to your room, we are going to put you there and lock you in, and if you keep up this sort of business we'll put you out of the ship entirely. Now what do you say?"

"I'd like to see you make me do anything I don't want to. I am not going to my room until I'm ready."

At this moment Chucks appeared, and took in the scene at a glance.

"Just leave him to me," he said, with a broad grin. "Open the door, Nat, and if that other fellow comes out brain him."

Nat opened the door and stood ready to floor Jones if he should come out; but the latter, considering discretion the better part of valor, remained in the privacy of his room.

Then Chucks made one sudden dive at the mate, and striking him in the stomach, with his bullet head, doubled him completely up, landing him in a helpless mass at the further end of the room.

After accomplishing this much he picked the man up as though he had been a child, and carrying him to his room dumped him head first in the barrel of water standing in one corner.

Leaving the wretch to extricate himself as best he might, the rascal Chucks then locked the door on the outside, and fastening Jones in as well, gave the keys to Nat.

"Well done, Chucks," laughed our hero; "you are an invaluable man to have on hand in case of a disturbance."

"Well, you see, the fact is, that being so fat I make an excellent butter."

"Put him out," laughed Frank. "You'll be the death of us with your bad jokes, my friend. I wonder how you can be so cruel."

"Let us hold a council of war," said Nat, sitting down at the table.

"Here is Ned Lewis and a lot of Esquimaux outside, and these two fellows inside. What are we going to do with them? We can't stay cooped up in here all the time, and we have to be assured of our safety if we go abroad. We don't want to feed and lodge a lot of ungrateful dogs who will turn against us at the first opportunity. Cartwright evidently came here expecting to winter aboard the vessel, knowing her position, and knowing also that she had never moved from it the day he abandoned his kind captain."

"Of course, he did not expect to find us here, and naturally he was disappointed. Being the first tenants, we have the first right to the place. There is room enough for all, and if he wants to stay here

behave himself he can do so, otherwise he must leave immediately after breakfast.

"In case we put him out, which I would feel perfectly justified in doing under the circumstances, because we are bound to look after our own peace and comfort, we shall have to guard against his treachery, as he is a vindictive, wicked man, and will take every mean advantage he can get.

"Now I want to ask you all, for our own safety, what we had better do—let him stay here on his good behavior, or oblige him to leave at once and never come back? I want to know what you all think, so as to be guided by the best judgment of the whole party, and not merely by my own feelings."

"If he promises to behave himself, and they do so, let him stay; if not, he must go. He came here with the Esquimaux, let him go away with them."

This was Job's opinion, and the others were similar, Frank adding:

"You cannot trust him. He will promise, and all the time be plotting against you. I have seen enough of the man, in my home, to make me thoroughly despise him. Would to Heaven he were not my father, and I sometimes believe he is not, we are so different."

The party then went to bed, and slept the remainder of the night, arising as usual, but omitting their customary scamper across the ice.

At breakfast both Jones and Cartwright were sullen and silent, saying nothing to anybody, but attending strictly to the business of satisfying their appetites.

"Now," said Nat, breakfast over, "let us come to an understanding. Do you intend to live harmoniously with us, or are we to be constantly on our guard against some new deviltry on your part? Are you going to behave yourselves like men, or like wolves?"

"I shall do just as I please," growled Cartwright.

"So will I," added Jones.

"That is sufficient. There is no room for you on board this ship. You must go at once."

"What! Turn us out to perish?" gasped Cartwright.

"You have forced the alternative upon yourselves, and there can be no appeal."

CHAPTER XX.

THE SERPENTS DRIVEN OUT—WELCOME ARRIVALS.

"You wouldn't drive us out to perish in this horrible place, would you?" repeated Cartwright.

"I have answered you. You found your way here, you can easily find the way back."

"You are a heartless young wretch!"

"I have no answer to make to such a charge from a person like yourself," was Nat's quiet answer.

"Won't you stand by your own father, Frank?" asked the man, appealing to the lad who stood apart from the rest.

"You are my father only in name; you have sacrificed every claim you might have had upon me. You are a traitor and a villain; I have no more to do with you."

"You're an unnatural brat."

To this Frank made no reply, but turned away, leaving the disposition of the case entirely in the hands of his friends.

Nat went to the top of the steps, and removing the fastenings of the doors, looked carefully out.

There was no one to be seen anywhere, nor any signs of the presence of man, save in the few foot-prints upon the newly fallen snow. He stepped out upon the deck and gazed all about him, but the same solemn silence which even reigned there still prevailed.

Then he stepped back into the cabin, and said to the two ungrateful guests:

"Now you must leave us; your friends have departed, but I have no doubt you will be able to find them again."

"You're bound we shall go?"

"Yes."

"And I am bound to stay!"

"Indeed? Then we must use force. Job!"

He gave a meaning glance to the harpooner as he spoke, and the two suddenly rushed upon Cartwright, and, despite his struggles, carried him up the steps, across the deck, and to the rail, whence they dropped him upon a snow bank a few feet below.

Jones, thinking that he could easily overpower the two remaining companions, began to make hostile demonstrations, but Chucks,

seizing him around the waist as though he had been but an infant, carried him upon deck and treated him as his comrade had been served a moment before.

"There, now," granted the rotund oarsman, "when you think you're going to fool with Mr. Chucks, you'll find you've got hold of the wrong man altogether."

Then, puffing and blowing, he retreated to the cabin, followed by Job, while Nat remained on deck and watched the two men pick themselves up and start on a walk across the ice, toward a towering mass of frozen snow or ice-covered rocks at some little distance off, behind which a number of men might easily have concealed themselves.

There was still sufficient light in the sky, from the aurora, to enable him to distinguish the dark outlines of their figures as the men moved away, and once he saw Cartwright turn and shake his fist at the ship.

He stood and watched them until they disappeared behind the mountain of ice, and then returned to the cabin to inform his friends.

"I don't want to be inhospitable," he said, "particularly in such a place as this; but we have our own safety to look after; and besides that, I am satisfied that they have abundant shelter close at hand, or at least the means of reaching it in a short time."

"We have not seen the last of him, I don't fancy," said Frank, in earnest tones, "although he may not trouble us again this winter."

At any rate, they did not see either of the two men or their companions for a week, and their life went on the same as ever—happy, well regulated and contented.

They had begun to forget all about the treacherous mate and his disturbing influence, when, one Saturday evening, as they were all seated around the table as they had been upon that other occasion, they heard a pounding upon the outer doors.

They all sprang to their feet, but one thought animating their breasts, and that was that the villains had returned.

Nat went above, and called out to know who was there.

"Tom Bunt and Bob Carter, seamen, of the bark Arctic Fox, whaler. Is that you, Nat Evans, for Heaven's sake?"

"Great goodness!" ejaculated Nat, "it's two more of our old comrades; but they are all right, I know. Are you alone, my men?"

"Yes."

"Haven't seen anything of Cartwright?"

"No, cuss him, nor I don't want to; he's a mean skunk!"

"Nor of Jones, nor Lewis?"

"No, and I don't want to see them nuther, for they're as bad as him."

Nat opened the door and admitted his old messmates, who were vastly astonished at everything they saw, being decidedly more so when they learned the whole strange history of the vessel and how she happened to be there.

"Then that only goes to show further what a villain this Cartwright is," said the old sailor; and he thereupon related the story of the mate's having abandoned Captain Hathaway, a fact of which the others had been ignorant until this time.

"I believe it was a regular plot," continued Tom, "and might've succeeded, hadn't it been for that iceberg. He left me and a lot o' poor fellows to perish, but I reckon his own crowd got picked off the same way, afore we got here."

"How did you get away, Bob?" asked Job. "You were in Wright's boat, and they said she was swamped and everybody lost."

"So they was, all but me, but I got on a cake of ice and floated on, and somehow my clothes didn't get wet; and knowing just enough to cover up my face, I fell asleep, and the snow covered me all up and kept me as warm as I could wish."

"So I floated on and on all night and part of the next day, sleeping like a baby, for I had been worn out by pulling in the boat, and afterwards struggling in the water along with poor Jack, who couldn't keep up, and who went right down afore my face."

"At last I was woke with a shock, and I found that a big iceberg, coming along faster than I was, had smashed right into my little cake and broke it all up."

"I was just going into the water, when I heard someone holler, and grabbing me by the hood of my fur jacket, pull me out of the snow drift where I had fallen asleep, and land me on the berg in a jiffy, like I had been a barrel of pork."

"That was me," said old Tom Bunt, with a grin.

"When the iceberg smashed the ship, I got out on what was left

of it, and Cartwright and some of the others went off in the boats. I floated away from 'em in the night and come across Bob in the morning, just as he says.

"I thought, first off, that he was a seal, and made up my mind to have a good breakfast; but when I seen it was only him, I laughed like to kill myself. In the confusion of the wreck, I had contrived to save a keg of water and one o' hardtack, besides a junk of cooked meat; so we weren't so badly off."

"It'd be a long story to tell about our wanderin's and livin' with a lot of Esquimaux," said Bob, resuming the narrative, but we finally made our way up here, hopin' to find some hut left by former explorers or castaways."

"We found one o' two o' those," continued Tom, "and managed to live on the food left in 'em; but the thing that surprised us most, was the finding of a regular bed of fossil coal, found right in the rocks and clean down under the ice!"

CHAPTER XXI.

OLD TOM'S TALE OF A GREAT DISCOVERY.

"A BED of coal?" said Nat, in great surprise.

"To be sure. I'd often heard it said that there must be huge beds of fossil coal up this a-way, an', in fact, folks has found 'em, though not so far up."

"It ain't so strange, anyway," interrupted Bob, "when you find volcanoes right in the very middle of snow and ice, a-spittin' fire an' lava an' all that sort o' stuff, and why shouldn't you find a bed o' coal?"

"At any rate, we did find it," protested Tom, "and it ain't more'n a day's journey from here. It was kind o' funny, our findin' it, and if you don't mind I'll tell ye all about it."

"I should indeed be glad to hear about this wonderful discovery," spoke up Nat, "and so would all of us; but are you not hungry? Your diet must have been frugal, to say the least, during your travels in these frozen regions."

"So it has, Nat, so it has. The polar bears an' foxes gin out long ago, and not even a seal nor a rabbit nor even a bit o' moss like what the reindeers eat, and which ain't so bad, by the way, have we found for two weeks."

"We didn't starve to death, though," added Bob, "for when we left the Esquimaux last we took I don't know how many yards o' dried bear's meat, winding it up tight and unrolling it as we wanted it. Then we had some oil, and with that an' water, or rather snow melted, we managed to live, though we wouldn't 've minded a bit o' hardtack or an' onion, for I was afeard o' gettin' the scurvy, an', indeed, I are got a touch of it now, and if ye've got anything what's good for it I wouldn't mind havin' some."

Chucks had not been idle all this time, and he now laid out a toothsome supper, not forgetting a fresh pot of fragrant coffee, the odor of which, as he poured it out, quite filled the room.

"Go to the store-room, Chucks," said Nat, "and bring out a bottle of that English lime-juice; a few doses of that will soon drive away your scurvy, my men. It's not a bad drink, mixed with water and a little sugar; quite like lemonade, in fact, and an excellent medicine into the bargain."

"Think o' calling lemonade medicine," laughed Tom.

"My dear man, one half, if not all of the food you take, is medicine in one way or another," replied Nat. "If you have the scurvy, you take apples, onions, potatoes, or other fresh vegetables; or the acid fruits, like limes or lemons. So in other cases, you know that this or that is good to take, and seems to go right to the spot. When you think you are only satisfying your own cravings, you are really applying nature's remedies, taking her medicines in fact, and so it goes."

"Well, I never," said Chucks, with open mouth, "and what's a good slice of rare roast beef a cure for?"

"For an empty stomach or a hearty appetite like yours, my boy," said Frank in reply, and then there was a general laugh, in which Chucks joined, of course.

"How did ye happen to find us, anyhow?" asked Job, when the men had partly satisfied their appetites, Nat cautioning them not to eat too heartily at first. "I'd deucedly like to know how everybody seems to find us. Before we came there wasn't anybody here for three years, an' now I'm blessed if the hull crew o' the Arctic Fox ain't turned up, one arter the other."

"I'll tell ye," said Tom, taking a copious draught of lime juice and water, which both he and Bob said seemed to go right to the spot, "me and Bob, early this mornin', as I s'pose it was, though it's all night now, and ye can't tell noon from eight bells in the night watch; me and Bob, as I was sayin', smelt smoke. Now I thought it was funny to smell coal and pitch pine smoke away up here in the cold, and I remarked to Bob about it.

"It's one o' them volcaners," says he.

"Volcaners be blowed," says I. "They don't smoke coal an' pitch pine any more than a cat smokes tobacco."

"Some o' the burnin' lava might a set fire to the bed o' coal we found," says he.

"I thought on that a minute, and then I says to him:

"The wind ain't right for that," I says. "No, my boy, that smoke an' the smell o' it tells me that there's men about, an' white men, too, for these yaller oil-drinkin' cusses don't know enough to burn coal."

"So we sot out again and made our way as nearly as we could toward the smoke, and it was a gettin' stronger all the time. 'Twas the first time the wind had been any ways lively for some days, and that's how we happened to smell it.

"To wind up a long yarn, we got nearer the smoke, and bimeby made out where it come from, and could see an occasional blast of flame with it, but not often.

"Bob declared it was a volcano, but I said no, though I own I was surprised to see it coming out in four or five places from a regular mass of snow and ice stuck up above the rest of the ice all around us.

"At last I knowed it was a ship and nothing else, and me and Bob was just glad enough to cry. We scrambled on deck, and, finding the door, hammered away on it, and that's all."

"We are right glad to see you," said Job, "and a derned sight more so than we was to have that sneakin' old Cartwright an' his chums come along."

"Now about the coal bed," said Nat; "I am eager to hear about it for that is a matter which interests us all. We don't know how soon we may have to draw upon it."

"All right, Nat, I'll proceed. The other day, as me and Bob was walking along, thumping the ice with our sticks, which were nothing more nor less than the shafts of two oars which Bob had been floating on the night his boat was stove, I struck through into something hard, just like a rock as it might be, and I says:

"Bob, that 'ere's a rock," says I; "we're onto solid land."

"He struck his stick down, and we broke through the ice, and sure enough there was the rocks—sure enough.

"We knowed we'd made a big discovery, and we pounded away on that ice till we'd cleared away a space big enough for both on us to stand on.

"We felt kind o' like as if we'd a'most found the North Pole findin' them rocks there right in the middle of all that ice, an' says I to Bob:

"We'd ought to have North Pole Nat here," says I; "for if we ain't found the Pole, we've got the rocks to plant it in."

"With that we both laughed, and then we went on for quite a piece, Bob considerable ahead of me, 'cause he war the spryer man o' the two.

"Suddenly I see him slip up and go slidin' down a sort o' slide like at the rate o' forty mile a minute, his feet and hands a-stickin' up, and him on the flat of his back like a turtle.

"I rushed ahead, and arter awhile came to a place where there was a decided slope, and at the other end a hole like the mouth of a cave.

"I was bound to know what had become of my mate, so I just squatted down on my hunkies like a jack-rabbit, and slid down that slope and into that cave like greased lightnin'.

"I slid a long ways, but finally I brunged up in the dark agin a solid mass of something arter I'd gone a good quarter mile, it seemed to me.

"Are ye here anywheres, Bob?" I hollered, and he answered me right away, and axed me had I a match.

"I didn't have that, but I had what was just as good—a flint and steel; and so taking a bit of a old neckacher, I soused it with oil, and we soon had a bright light.

"Then we seed as we was in a cave of rocks and ice, and at the bottom of it was a lot of black stuff, which it didn't take us long to find out was soft coal.

"There was piles an' piles of it, and the place was quite warm like, no ice nor snow on the bottom, but on'y the coal, so's we was able to knock off several chunks, and piling 'em on the rocks to one side, we soon had as pretty a fire as ever ye seed.

"You can bet that coal fire done us a heap o' good, for we knowed that if we couldn't find any more houses nor anything, that we come back there and have all the fire we wanted.

"We stayed around there all night and cooked some of our dried meat, and then started out again, and to-night or to-day, whichever it is, we found you."

"That is an important discovery," remarked Nat; "and I propose that as there are now six of us, some of us go off on an expedition with drags, shovels and picks, and get as much of the coal as we can bring away. Two or three such trips will give us all the coal we shall want for some time to come."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE EXPEDITION TO THE COAL BEDS—AN UNPLEASANT SURPRISE.

NAT's proposition was received with every demonstration of approval, and the rest of the evening was spent in discussing the means for carrying it out.

Ten o'clock came much sooner than anyone expected, and although they would have liked to talk the matter over all night, Nat sent them all off to bed and promised to renew the discussion the next day, for although a constant darkness reigned, relieved only by the brilliancy of the northern lights, the time was divided up the same as it would have been had they been in more southern latitudes.

Tom Bunt and Bob were found to be valuable acquisitions to the party, as they not only fell in harmoniously with all the arrangements instituted by Nat, but when any work was to be done, their strong arms were always to be relied upon, and never a grumble nor a growl was heard from their lips from one day's end to another.

Three or four days intervened before the expedition was ready to start, and this time was occupied in making drags or sledges which to transport the coal from the bed to the ship.

Nothing was seen of either the Esquimaux or their white men, and all fear of seeing them again was totally dispelled, and, in fact, all hands were too busy to think of such unpleasant subjects.

The touch of the scurvy which Bob Carter had begun to

quickly disappeared after he had been on the Adventurer a day or so, owing to the fresh food and lime-juice, and he felt himself a new man.

There is no disease so terrible in its ravages as scurvy, and none which can be so quickly arrested and cured upon the application of proper remedies, which consist mostly in fresh vegetables and fruits, particularly apples and lemons.

At last the party were ready to start, two stout drags, with high sides, having been made, with stout ropes to pull them along by, there being no dogs that could be pressed into the service.

It was not deemed expedient to abandon the ship entirely, as the fires would have to be kept up, and as Frank was less strong and able to bear fatigue than any of the rest, he agreed to remain behind.

He would have liked to go, but Nat told him he'd better not, and that satisfied him, and he expressed a perfect willingness to remain and "keep house" while the rest were away, which would not be more than forty-eight hours at the most.

Consequently, one morning, after breakfast, behold him standing, well up forward, upon the vessel's deck, watching his companions as they go away, dragging their sledges behind them, laden with shovels, picks, logs of wood for building fires, extra furs for protection at night, food, water, and other necessities.

"Good-by, boys!" he shouts. "I wish you all manner of luck. You'll find me here when you come back."

"Don't run away with some Esquimau gal, now," yelled Chucks, though, I know you've a liking for them."

"More likely their runnin' away with him, I guess," said Job, with a laugh, "far I don't think no white man in his senses would willingly go off with one on 'em. Frank's young yet, though, and the gals couldn't fool him like they could the older fellers."

Frank stood and watched them out of sight, a certain expression of sadness stealing into his handsome young face, notwithstanding his natural cheerfulness.

"Pshaw!" he muttered, as he returned to the cabin, "there can't anything happen to them in that short time. There's five of them, and they are all strong and well armed and able to cope successfully with thrice their number of Esquimaux. They will be back when they say, and there's no need to fret."

The lad applied himself diligently to the duties at hand, looking after the fires, clearing away the remains of the breakfast, washing and scrubbing the various utensils, and putting them in their proper places, and doing a hundred little things that needed doing, and which took time.

Besides preparing his own meals and taking his usual daily exercise, the lad also amused himself by reading and studying; and at last, when he shut up everything for the night, banked up the fires, made an entry in his journal, wound up the chronometers, and turned in to sleep, the day seemed to have been quite short, despite his being all alone.

While Frank was thus actively employed by himself at home on the ship, his companions were making their way over the ice, which was mostly smooth enough for travel, although occasionally a wide detour was necessary, towards the natural bed of coal discovered by the two sailors.*

By aid of their boat compasses and the recollection of the seamen, the party succeeded in finding the cave at the end of a tramp of about seventeen hours.

They calculated that it would take them about as long to return, for though they had a better idea of the direction now than they had before, the weight of the coal would be considerable, and the drawing it would consume the extra time gained in returning by a more direct route.

At all events, they estimated that they should not be gone much longer than they promised, and they knew that Frank would not worry even should they be half a dozen hours behind time.

They agreed to take a rest of five or six hours before getting to work, having been so long on the march; so after cooking and eating a hearty supper, they encamped within the cave, covering themselves up warmly, and sleeping almost as soundly as though they were aboard the ship.

At the end of six hours Nat awoke, and arousing his companions, they lit half a dozen torches and setting them up around the cavern set to work in good earnest.

The picks flew, and as the big lumps of soft coal were turned up they were shoveled away by Chucks and Job, who, after a little, took up picks and gave the shovels to Nat and Tom, they changing off with Bob and Chucks, who, in turn, were relieved by Tom and Job.

As the coal was shoveled away it was piled upon one of the sledges, and when a sufficient load was made, all hands took hold and drew it up the incline to the outside, where it was thrown upon the other sledge.

They worked steadily for about four hours, during which time a considerable amount of the precious deposit had been mined, after which they took a rest for an hour or so, in order not to become too much fatigued, for despite the ease with which the coal was gotten out, it was tiresome work nevertheless.

After a couple of hours' rest the gang put in another four hours' work, and then knocked off for the day, having filled one of the sledges and covered the bottom of the other.

Then the fire was replenished, and after supper and several hours'

chat they went to sleep for eight hours, completing the filling of the other sledge after breakfast.

It will not be necessary to speak of the return, save to say that it took them longer than they supposed it would, the journey occupying twenty-four hours, several long halts having to be made upon the way.

At last they reached the ship, and Nat shouted out to Frank to tell him that they had got back, thinking it strange that the boy was not on the lookout for them, although it was past midnight.

He clambered upon the deck, when the first thing that met his gaze was the cabin doors standing wide open.

Filled with a vague apprehension that all was not right, he rushed down into the cabin, and found it empty and in a state of confusion.

Worse than that, Frank was missing!

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN SEARCH OF THE MISSING BOY.

FRANK TRAFTON was indeed missing, and his former comrades were utterly overwhelmed.

The boy had so endeared himself to them, and particularly to Nat, by his quiet dignity, pleasant manners, cheerful vivacity, and winning ways, that his loss was greater than any of them had imagined. There was no trace of him to be seen, except, perhaps, the general neatness of everything, save a certain confused look in the cabin, that denoted too plainly that he had been carried away by force.

"Someone has come, during our absence," said Nat, "and carried him away. Oh, why did we leave him here alone? I might have suspected that those villains would be watching for just such a chance, and in our absence may have improved their opportunity."

"The clocks are both going yet," said Chucks, "so it can't be very long since he went away."

"See if they are nearly run down, or if they have been recently wound up," said Nat.

Job made an investigation, and ascertained, as nearly as he could calculate, that they had been wound the evening before.

"Didn't he keep a log, or diary, or something of that sort?" suggested Nat again.

"I reckon he did," answered Chucks; "his room door is open, perhaps you'd better look."

Nat went in and found everything in the utmost order, the bed made up, the room swept and tidied, and everything indicating Frank's recent presence and his orderly ways.

There was a book lying open upon the little table set against the bulwark in one corner, and an open inkstand and pen beside it showed how lately it had been used.

Nat looked only at the last entry, which was a general record of the previous day, and a scheme for the next day's work.

"It is dated November 26," said Nat, excitedly. "That is this very day, and barely twelve hours ago, for he has the hour attached. Oh, why didn't we make better time? The delay of a few hours has caused us all this misery."

"Come here!" cried old Tom, in great excitement from without. "See what I've found in a corner."

Nat went into the cabin and found the old tar holding up a mitten, a white bearskin mitten of considerable size.

"That 'ere mitten belongs to one o' them bloody raw meat eaters," said Bob Carter. "None on us has 'em, and I know nuther Cartwright nor Jones nor Ned Lewis or any o' them had sich. They was all seal or brown bear, or beaver or sich like."

"Then the Esquimaux have carried him off, confound their greasy hides!" ejaculated Nat, emphatically. "Stop!"

"What's the matter?" asked Job.

"Cartwright and the rest had Esquimaux with them. They have been hovering about the place, though we have not seen them, and while we were away they have come and taken our poor little Frank away."

"Just let me catch sight of 'em," muttered Chucks, "and if I don't put one of them exploding bombs right through them you can call me an Injun!"

"Hold on a bit," cried the harpooner, suddenly, and in an instant he had dashed open the doors and was outside.

"I wonder what idea has struck him now?" mused Tom. "I'll bet a cent he's got hold o' something."

"I'd give a pair o' sealskin boots to know where Frank is," remarked Chucks, "that's what I would."

Just then Job's voice was heard calling to them from outside, and they all went out.

"I've found the trail of the miserable vagabonds right in the fresh snow," he said. "I know they is Esquimaux by their feet, and you can tell Frank's little foot from the others."

"What's this?" cried Nat, suddenly, as he leaped down upon the ice.

The object that had attracted his attention was a bit of white fur that had caught upon a long icicle which depended from the ship's rail.

"That came off of Frank's great coat, the one the old man used to wear," remarked Chucks.

"I remember now, that I did not see it hanging upon the nail in the cabin, where he usually keeps it," observed our hero.

"The poor little fellow will be comfortable at all events," said Job; "for that white coat was as warm as an oven. I've got an idea."

"What is it?" asked all the rest in chorus.

"There's a bright aurora up there, and that's all the light we want. Anyhow we can take torches. Suppose we wind up the clocks, fix

* This is no fiction, such a thing as natural coal-beds being found in high latitudes being an actual fact, which a glance at any good work upon geology or natural history will demonstrate.

the fires so they'll last a day at least, shut up the house, and go off to look for Frank."

"But the scoundrels have sledges," said Nat.

"That's all right. They may have halted somewhere to take a snooze. Perhaps they ain't more than three or four hours ahead of us; we can't tell."

"You're right, and you give me fresh courage. Back to the ship, every man, and haste our preparations."

Everything was done that could be, and then Nat locked the cabin doors and closed the outside one as well as he could, so that the snow would not be driven in by the wind, after which the party set out.

Chucks had his bomb-gun and box of bombs. Job was provided with his trusty harpoon, and the rest had axes and sheath knives.

The sledges of coal were left where they had been drawn, under the lee of the vessel, and then by the light of their torches and that of the celestial torch, which glowed so brightly in the Heavens, the brave companions started off upon the trail of their beloved friend and messmate.

The trail was still fresh, and they followed it rapidly, the excitement adding speed to their feet and strength to their limbs.

They had not neglected to provide themselves severally with a quantity of such food as could be put in the smallest compass and would afford the most nourishment, pemmican supplying both of those requisites.

This, with a dozen cakes of hard-tack each, would enable them to subsist for two days at least, and in case they met with any game, which they did not think likely, however, they could easily supply themselves with more provisions.

They traveled until midnight, the track being still quite plain, but in case of its being obliterated before they would want to return, Nat had taken the precaution to bring a compass with him, which he consulted every hour or so, in order to keep his bearings.

At midnight they halted for half an hour while they partook of refreshment, and discussed the situation in all its bearings.

The cold was not nearly as intense as it had been, and the temperature was really quite endurable, there being very little wind and no snow, nor any signs of there being a fall for the present.

The air was just bracing enough to be pleasant, and to make exercise invigorating, and not one of the party complained of the cold, all being in the best of spirits, although of course anxious to find the object of their search.

After taking a short rest the party set out once more, Nat being desirous of decreasing the lead which the Esquimaux had as much as possible, and he would have gone twenty-four hours without a halt if he had thought that by so doing he could overtake the villains.

He was not decided in his mind whether Cartwright had seized the lad or not, but he was fully resolved that no kindly feelings should interfere between him and his vengeance if he found that the man had done his young friend any injury.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A STRANGE ENCOUNTER—QUEER FACTS CONCERNING FRANK.

"FORWARD, my friends," cried our hero. "We can spend no extra time in resting now; when we find Frank, then we can rest all we want to."

"The ice is getting rough," remarked Job, "and the sledges can't go over it so easy. The skunks have had to get out and walk, so as to ease up on the dogs."

"God grant it may never get any smoother, then, till we come up with the wretches!"

Such was Nat's fervent ejaculation, and everyone wished the same, as they pressed forward, the ice as yet being none too rough to walk over.

An hour, two, three, four passed, and the path had not mended, being, if anything, more uneven than before, and Nat was set to thinking by the circumstance.

"I cannot decide," he said, after a pause, "whether this roughness is caused by the pressing in of the yearly formation of ice upon our perennial belt, or whether we have passed beyond that and are now within the influence of the annual freezing and thawing."

"Your ice belt is not wide enough to hold its own against the pack ice, if we have got out of it so soon," suggested Job.

"You must be right, Job, and we have not yet passed the limit of perpetual ice. Anyhow, let us push on, for the rougher our road gets the more hope there is for our catching up with these fellows."

"Nothing would please me better than to have the biggest stretch of open water ye ever see, shutting right across the path, and all around it, too," answered Job, "for then we'd corner the cusses."

"Hark a bit!" cried Chucks, "there's something going on ahead of us, and if it ain't behind yon mountain of ice, then I'm mistaken."

There was certainly the sound of human voices to be heard, and voices, too, that spoke English, for several words could be heard very plainly.

"Who can it be?" said Job. "They're fighting, whoever it is, and most likely with the pesky Esquimaux."

"They're white men," said Nat, quickly, "and we are bound to go to their assistance, whoever they may be. Shout, boys, shout, that they may know that friends are at hand."

All hands set up a tremendous shouting, and Chucks fired off one of his bombs in the air, to let the Esquimaux know that the dreaded "fire sticks" of the white men were coming.

There was an answering shout from the beleaguered party, whom

our friends could not see as yet, and then a tremendous howl of dismay, which could have come from none but the throats of the Inuits.

With nerves excited to the highest pitch, the little party pushed forward, and soon the path became smooth and hard again, so that the most rapid progress possible could be made.

Nat was ahead, ax in hand, and close behind followed Job, Tom and Rob, while Chucks brought up the rear, puffing and blowing like a porpoise.

The mountains of ice which Chucks had seen were presently reached and rounded, and then the party came upon an exciting scene.

Some three or four white men were engaged in defending themselves against a score of dirty, degraded-looking Esquimaux, while not far away, close to a collection of snow huts or igloos, were two or three packs of snarling dogs, fighting and howling and mixing themselves up most inextricably.

"Courage, my friends," yelled Nat, and then he and his whole party hurled themselves upon the enemy, cutting right and left, and dealing out anything but love pats upon the thick skulls of the wretched Mongolians, for to that race do these creatures belong, and not to the Indian, as supposed by many.

The enemy, seeing such a sudden acquisition to the ranks of their would-be victims, and not knowing how many more there might be, fled in dismay, not to their huts, but across the ice, taking their dogs and sledges with them.

In a few moments the spot was deserted except by the party of whites, and their rescuers, and then Nat advanced toward him who seemed to be the leader, being the tallest and stoutest.

As he stepped forward the man turned his face towards him, causing our hero to start back in the greatest astonishment.

"Mr. Cartwright!" he gasped. "It seems we are fated to meet at the most unexpected times and in the most out-of-the-way places."

"North Pole Nat again, as I live and breathe!" exclaimed Cartwright, for he indeed it was. "Here we are again, Jones and Ned Lewis, and Dick Rudd, one of our old seamen."

"My arrival was most opportune, it appears?"

"Yes, and I'm obliged to ye, though you did twice turn me away from your door like a dog."

"Let us not speak of that, sir; there are matters of more importance just now. You brought your harsh treatment upon yourself by your declining to submit to our rules and by your treachery."

"Perhaps I was too eager to get things under my own control, but I'm sorry for it, and I don't bear you or your chums any ill-will for what you did. Me and my friends have been living in those huts since I saw ye last, and generally we got along."

"Those Esquimaux were not the same ones then who were with you when you came to the ship?"

"No, they have gone away, but are coming back. They are all right, but these fellows is a new lot and are bad."

"Let me ask you, sir, and you cannot blame me for still suspecting your sincerity, what have you done with Frank?"

The man's surprise was not assumed, but perfectly genuine, as he repeated:

"What have I done with Frank?"

"Yes; he is missing from the ship, and we have come to hunt for him. Where is he?"

"My God, Nat, I swear to you that I haven't seen him since the day we left the Adventurer. I'll take my oath on it," and he spoke so earnestly that there could be no doubting the truth of his words, even when one knew what a villain he was.

"Are you telling the truth?"

"So help me Heaven! Ain't I, men?" he continued, addressing his comrades.

"He ain't a lyin', not a bit," said Jones. "Neither him nor me nor any of us has seen Frank since the day you turned us out of the ship."

"Nor you either?" asked Job, turning to the former shipkeeper.

"No, Job, I haven't seen a sign of him, and so ain't any of us. What's happened to the lad?"

"We don't know. We were obliged to leave the ship for a while, and upon our return he had gone; and there was every indication that he had been carried away by force, and had not merely strayed away."

"I'm sorry for the lad," said Cartwright, "though he wasn't no relation of mine."

"You are his father," said Nat; "he told us so himself."

"He wasn't, for all that," returned the man, "though he thought he was. I tell you he was no son of mine."

"But he lived with you, and considered you his father?"

"True enough, and I'll explain. My mates here knowed nothing of all this, for to them the boy was only Frank Trafton, a lad I'd brought on board."

"That's all he was," remarked Jones.

"The boy was brought up as my own child," continued the mate, "and I never said anything to him which would make him think he wasn't. The truth of the matter was, that I lost my own children, a boy and girl, twins, when they were little, and I took two more, twins just like mine, to bring up."

"Their own mother died after they did, and I felt so lonesome that I wanted someone to look after, and so took the young ones, as I say, moving to another part of the country, so as nobody would know the difference."

"The youngsters grew up, and I named them Frank and Charlotte, just as my own had been named. When I came to go with Captain Hathaway, I told Frank he'd better go as cabin-boy."

"I called him Frank Trafton, and that's his name, his own name. The girl died during my voyage to the North Pole, for as you seem to know all about that, I don't see as there's any use denyin' it.

"I did abandon Evans, but it was only for my own safety. As far as killing those six men goes, I didn't do it, though I know who did put the charcoal in the stove, but he's dead, now, and there ain't any gettin' at him.

"As I said, Frank's real name was Trafton, though he thought it was his middle name. His folks died before I took him and his sister from the foundling hospital. He was not to be known as my son, because I had a plan in view when I shipped him on the Arctic Fox."

"Which plan was that he should kill me," said Nat, excitedly. "You might as well complete your confession."

CHAPTER XXV.

MORE ABOUT FRANK—A FORLORN HOPE.

CARTWRIGHT did not appear at all abashed by Nat's abrupt speech, but went on in the same careless manner.

"I don't see as there is any use in denyin' it, for that's just exactly what I did put him up to, for reasons of my own."

"You might have made a clean breast of the whole matter, sir," interrupted Nat. "I know you and your whole history. Frank has told me, and the log-book of my father, Nathaniel Alonzo Evans, has revealed to me the whole narrative of your baseness."

"Well, suppose it has?"

"You ought to know that I am perfectly aware of your treachery to my father, and your fears that I might some day learn of this. There is your motive for wanting to get rid of me. By falsehoods and misrepresentations you inflamed the boy against me, though, fortunately, his own true nature was proof against your wiles."

"I don't understand."

"I do, and so does Frank. His own good heart told him that I was not the monster you would have made me out; that my father was innocent of the charges brought against him, or at least, if he was not, that it was not right to punish me for what he may have done. The log-book set him right at last, and he denounced you with all the impetuosity of his nature."

"H'm! You think a great deal of the young one?"

"I do."

"Let me tell you then that he has kept the great secret of his life from you, and that you don't know him half so well as you think. He has been deceiving you all the time, and some day you'll find it out."

"I will never believe him false, no matter what you say."

"That's all right. Beyond a doubt you won't see Frank Trafton again if he's got among the Esquimaux, for they're treacherous devils."

"No more so than some whites I could tell on," interrupted Job.

"Now he's gone, I might as well say that I do feel a little sorry for the kid, though he was a disappointment to me. He didn't act as my own boy would have, and though I wouldn't harm him myself, I ain't particularly sorrowful, as I know, because he's gone."

"You might be grateful for the love he has bestowed upon you all these years, believing himself to be your son."

"He didn't love me much. Charlie—that's the girl, though I always called her that—thought a deuced sight more of me than Frank. Charlie wouldn't 've winced if I'd put her on your track."

"Enough of this! I'm going in search of the lad, for I do not believe him dead. You may have no interest in him, but I have."

"All right! But I want to tell you one thing. You've done the square thing by me, and I'm no enemy of yours, though I don't like to say I'm your friend."

"I'd rather you wouldn't," replied Nat, sententiously.

"If you'll wait till the Esquimaux come back, which will be in a few hours, I'll go with you and help you all I can. You have sledges and dogs, and all that, and can get on faster."

"Then you don't really think that the search after Frank is entirely hopeless?"

"Of course he don't," interpolated Ned Lewis. "Didn't he and I and all of us see that the Inuits had a prisoner—a white prisoner—tied to a sledge, and that he wore a great white fur coat, which covered him from head to foot?"

"My God, 'tis Frank himself!" cried Nat. "Why did you not tell me this before?"

"Because I didn't think of it, that's all."

"I remember the fellow," said Cartwright, "now that Ned speaks of it, and I thought there was only one coat like that, and that was the captain's."

"You knew well enough it was Frank, you miserable villain!" yelled Chucks, "for you saw him wear it when you were in the ship, and on the Arctic Fox, too, many a time. Blast your lyin' heart, take that!"

The indignant Chucks struck the man a stunning blow in the face with his mittened fist, which knocked him off his feet and sprawled him over one of the low igloos, or ice huts, in a most undignified manner.

Cartwright's friends were going to resent the insult to their leader, but Chucks threw his big gun to his shoulder and cried out warningly:

"Stop where you are or I'll blow you sky high! This thing is loaded, and it goes off mighty easy!"

Nat, Job, Tom Bunt and Bob Carter closed in behind Chucks, and the opposition party saw that it would be no use to make any hostile

demonstration, as in the event of a fight they would probably get the worst of it.

Cartwright arose, not very much hurt, and glowering at Chucks, said:

"It's lucky for you that you've got North Pole Nat for a backer, my porpoise-bellied friend, or I'd make a hole in you and reduce your size. I ain't going to hurt ye now, but if you and I ever meet alone, you can know what to expect from me, so don't forget it!"

"Ya! Go and fight your own shadow! You can't frighten me."

"Let us be off at once, my friends," said Nat. "These villains cannot be far ahead of us now."

"Won't you wait and stay with us?" asked Jones. "Our huts lead away down under the ice where it's warm, and we've lots of furs to sleep on and plenty to eat."

"No; we must push on."

"You may find Frank for just one reason," said Cartwright, "but there's one thing you'll never find."

"What's that?"

"The North Pole."

"Don't you be too sure of that. I am further north than any one has ever been, and in the spring it will be but an easy matter to make our way there."

"Not if I can help it!" growled the brute to himself. "No Yankee shall find the Pole if I can prevent. I'd forego the honor myself rather than let an American have it."

"Onward, my brave boys!" cried Nat. "There is still hope for us. Our noble little Frank shall yet be restored to us."

As they hurried away Cartwright muttered to himself:

"Fool that I was to bring them together! I might have known the consequences. The secret will come out, and in spite of me the young whelp will be successful. How I hate him! He is just like his father. And the very means which I took to insure his ruin will prove to be his happiness. I know what will happen when Frank is found. May the fiend prevent it!"

Away over the snow and ice goes the little party of rescuers, their hearts animated with the highest hopes, and their pulses beating with excitement.

They strike off considerably to the eastward of the course they have been pursuing, and to their dismay, they see that the course is smooth and hard, affording the best possible escape to the pursued.

"I will follow them if I reach the Pole," said Nat. "Oh, the villainy of that man! He is jealous of me, and would, if he dared, obstruct every single step I take toward honor and happiness. I will not give up now, when success is so near. These vile savages shall see how brave Yankee tars can fight!"

On and on they went through the night, the task seeming almost hopeless; but, in spite of all that, keeping up their courage and never once faltering on the way.

At last, worn out by almost ceaseless travel, they were obliged to take a halt at the end of the second day after leaving Cartwright, and under the lee of an icy bluff they sank exhausted.

Their food was nearly gone, and they had not found any game. The journey back would have to be made without food, and in an exhausted condition, the end of which would be easily foreseen—death!

The snow was now beginning to fall heavily, the wind whirling it about in great drifts, and utterly obliterating the track made by the Esquimaux.

Their case seemed utterly without hope, but Nat would not despair, and crawling closer to the sheltering base, he divided his last remnant of food among his companions, and then putting the hood of his jacket over his face, he lay down and let the snow drift all over him like a blanket.

The others did the same, lying snugly together, and in a few moments, so wild was the storm, they were covered a foot deep with the fleecy snow, and were wrapt in peaceful slumber, being as warm and comfortable as though on board the ship.

The storm lasted all night, and the five comrades slept soundly through it all, while the wind howled and shrieked and the snow fell thick and fast, drifting in a tent like canopy over the sleepers, and preventing the wind from uncovering them.

Chucks was the first one to awake, and after thrusting his head through the snow, he gazed with surprise at the tent over his head, and then aroused his companions.

They made such a stir and bustle in getting out that they shook the drift down upon themselves, and then they had to be dug out once more, and there was a great deal of sport and laughter over it, until at last they all scrambled out and took a run over the snow, which had already frozen hard, the crust being firm enough to walk on.

"What shall we do now?" asked Job.

"Push on! The Esquimaux have been delayed by the storm, and we may yet overtake them."

It seemed the very height of folly, but no one would dispute Nat, and so they set out, taking as nearly what they thought to be the right course as possible.

For several hours they continued their way over the hardened snow, Nat chatting merrily to keep up their spirits, though Heaven knows, his own were at a low enough ebb, when Chucks, who usually proved to be the discoverer of the party, yelled out:

"Look! Look! There is a whole gang of Esquimaux, and they are coming right toward us!"

It needed but a second to convince them all that the rosy fellow was right.

"Aha! so the enemy has turned against us?" said Nat. "Well, we must fight them. Stand by me, my friends!"

The devoted companions in joy and sorrow, in sadness and happiness, stood close to one another, their weapons grasped firmly, while with a rush and a whirl the savage horde swept down upon them like the wind, as sudden and as swift.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE LOST ONE FOUND—REJOICINGS.

"STAND firm, my friends," said Nat, "and let us die like heroes!"

They stood firm, prepared to die like heroes indeed, the Esquimaux coming closer and closer in their sledges, the dogs scampering like the wind itself.

Nearer still they come, and now Nat can see that the sledges are full, and the men are all armed with spears and look very ferocious.

"They will soon close in upon us," he says, "but don't give up as long as you have a drop of blood left. Don't fire yet, Chucks. Wait until you are sure of hitting them."

Still nearer come the sledges, and now one darts off upon one side, while a white-robed figure rises to its full height and cries out:

"Hurrah, my lads! I'm glad to see you! Stop your horses, my friend, or rather, your dogs."

Can it be possible that the figure in white is he whom they have sought so earnestly?

Frank?

Yes, it is no one else. It is the cabin boy—the genial, merry Frank himself.

The sledge comes to a halt at last, and Frank, leaping out, runs swiftly to Nat and hugs him—envelopes him completely in the flaps of the great white coat, and laughs and cries alternately.

"God bless you, Nat! Here I am once more!" cries Frank, joyously, "and here are all of you! Did you miss me? Have you been looking for me long? Were you frightened?"

"Stop, stop, my boy!" cried Nat, with a laugh. "You ask me too many questions at once. I can't answer as fast as that."

"But you missed me?"

"Indeed we did, and would have dared anything for your sake."

"Well, here I am, and these fat fellows are going to take you and me and all of us back to the ship. I can't understand their lingo very well, but they're going to do it."

"This isn't a lark, is it, Frank?" asked Nat, gravely.

"What isn't a lark?"

"Your being taken away and frightening us all so?"

"No, indeed! I was carried away in good earnest."

"Did they not mean to bring you back?"

"Not until I——"

"Well?"

"Oh, I can't tell you now, but it was really no joke, and the dirty wretches did mean to keep me forever. They changed their minds, though, and now we're going home—home to the ship. Jump in."

It was very evident, from the actions of the Esquimaux, that they intended to take Nat and his companions back to the ship, and so, without further ado, they all got into the sledges, the long whips of deerskin were snapped, the snarling little white dogs, looking like foxes and each guided by a separate rein, leaped forward, and away went the whole party, getting over the smooth, white path with the literal speed of the wind.

Frank and Nat were cuddled together in the bottom of the same sledge, and presently Nat said:

"I don't understand this at all, Frank. Why should these fellows bring you back?"

"They had their reasons."

"And you know them?"

"I think so."

"Why can't you tell me, then?"

"Will you not trust to me, Nat, to take my own time? I cannot tell you now—I really cannot! Rely on me for awhile, and trust me. I will let you know the whole story some day, but now it is impossible."

"It is a secret you are pledged to keep inviolable?"

"Yes."

"Then say no more about it, my lad. I can and will trust you. It is enough for me that you are safe once more with us, and that we are going back to the ship. I have got a secret as well as you, my lad."

"Are you going to keep it from me because I won't tell mine?" asked Frank, naively.

"No, for all the party know it as well as myself. You are not the child of Cartwright."

"Do you mean it?" cried Frank, his cheeks turning crimson.

"Yes."

"Thank God!"

Nothing could exceed the fervency with which these words were spoken, and even then they but faintly mirrored the depths of thankfulness which the lad felt on hearing the wonderful piece of news.

"You are Frank Trafton and nothing else," said Nat, and then he gave Frank an account of all that had happened since they had seen him last, from the time when they started for the coal beds until they had met him among the Esquimaux.

It is not necessary to describe the journey back to the ship, it being enough to say that it was accomplished in a very much shorter time than could have been done without the sledges.

The fires were out and the chronometers run down, but for all that they were home again, and never had the sight of the well known fig-

ure of the frozen sentinel upon the bowsprit awakened such feelings of gratitude as it did now.

Frank parted kindly with the Esquimaux, making them understand that he was very grateful to them, and that when the ice broke up in the spring, if it ever did break up, that they were all going to the Pole.

Nat made the greasy fellows a few trifling presents, and then they dashed off, dogs, sledges and all, leaving our friends to their ice-bound home, and the enjoyment of each other's society.

It did not take long to put things to rights again, the coal which the explorers had found being stowed within the hold for use on future occasions.

Job set the clocks by guess; Chucks relit the fires and got up a grand dinner in honor of the joyful occasion, and the first evening around the cabin table was one long to be remembered.

Nat found some wine among the stores, which had been overlooked by the busy Chucks, and that evening a bottle was brought out, and after the repast had been cleared away—and indeed there was little of it to be cleared—Frank's health was drank amid the most joyful excitement.

"It would be just about Thanksgiving time at home," remarked Chucks, "and if it wasn't for our not having turkey, this would be our Thanksgiving, for I never was so thankful in all my life as I am now to have Frank back."

"You'll spoil me between you all," laughed Frank. "I am as glad to see you as you are to see me, and I hope there won't be any more mysterious disappearances."

"How did those fellows happen to get hold of you, Frank?" asked Nat during the evening.

"I heard a barking, and thinking that there might be some Arctic foxes about, I just slipped on my white coat and ran out to have a peep at them, never supposing but what if they were too near I could dodge inside."

"Having been on board a vessel called the Arctic Fox, I was anxious to see if our figurehead—you remember it, don't you?—looked anything like the real creatures."

"I went outside and leaned over the rail to see the Arctic foxes, and saw instead a lot of spitz dogs, and worse yet, a horde of greasy Inuits."

"I beat a hasty retreat, of course, but as ill luck would have it, the wretches had seen me, and they set up a howl at once and bounded toward the ship."

"I tripped myself up by stepping on my coat, and before I could get inside and bar the door the wretches had forced an entrance."

"I struggled with them, and rolled down-stairs with one of them, his mitten coming off during the fight. I kicked and scratched and shouted, but it was no use, and they picked me up just as if I'd been a bag of wool and carried me down to their sledges."

"They didn't stop to overhaul the vessel, being frightened, I guess, at the ice-covered figure on the bow, but away they went, with me tumbled over on my back and securely tied."

"They had a fight with some whites, and I heard a gun go off, and I knew that you and Chucks were there, but I couldn't make myself known, and they lugged me off."

"That's all there is, except that they brought me back, for reasons best known to themselves. But it's eleven o'clock and after, and I'm going to turn in. Good-night!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE RIGORS OF WINTER—GETTING READY FOR CHRISTMAS.

THERE were one or two more expeditions to the coal beds after that, Nat thinking it best to be well supplied before the extreme cold of December and January should set in.

Frank was not left alone in the vessel any more, however, but accompanied the party on one occasion, Chucks remaining behind.

On the last expedition Chucks and Frank both stayed behind, and when Nat returned he said that was the last, as the danger would be too great a risk going again.

December had now set in, the day of Nat's return being the sixth of the month, and the weather already had undergone a material change.

Although our friends were hearty, strong and less susceptible to the influence of the cold than persons used to a more temperate climate, they found it quite necessary to clothe themselves as warmly as their supplies would admit, there being everything they could possibly use to keep out the cold and keep in the heat.

The thermometer outside the cabin door frequently went as low as sixty degrees below zero, and Chucks insisted the smoke from the chimneys froze so solid some mornings that it took him longer than usual to get the breakfast.

There was no danger of the supplies giving out, and they all had good appetites, and did not neglect them by any means, Chucks having gained ten pounds since coming aboard, or at least Job said he had.

Tom and Bob were inclined to remain in their beds longer than the hour prescribed for arising, but Nat warned them against this, telling them that they would be less apt to stand the extreme cold.

"You won't be any warmer after being in bed a certain time," he said, "but if anything you will grow colder, owing to impartial circulation. Get up and stir around, that will make you warm. Keeping your blood lively will do more towards keeping up the internal fires than a ton of bed clothes."

It was too cold to work outside as yet, but Nat made a work shop in the waist of the ship, and he and his companions constructed two

canvas boats, light and strong, the keels, ribs, gunwales and thwarts being of wood and the rest of canvas.

This was made thoroughly water-proof by various applications of oil, there being a goodly quantity in the stores.

There were two thicknesses of canvas, and these were reinforced at places where there would be any extra strains, so that besides being light, the boats were strong and thoroughly water-proof within and without.

This work occupied considerable time, but all hands engaged in it, there being something that each one could do, Frank being particularly expert in sewing up long seams and fitting the different parts together, and Bob being especially good at the carpenter work.

Being constantly employed kept the little colony happy and contented, never a cross word or petulant expression being heard from morning to night.

Of course there was more or less good-natured bantering, but that was merely the spice which increased the feeling of thorough good-fellowship which prevailed.

They were a happy family indeed, and when any one wanted a hint or suggestion or a bit of advice, someone of the others was always ready to give it.

The days were given to work and exercise, and the evening to social recreation, not forgetting a certain part of each day which was given to study, for Nat and Frank were deep in the mysteries of navigation, and wanted only the practical demonstration of the theories they had mastered to enable them to make rapid progress.

They did not always read at night, for Tom Bunt had made a set of dominoes, Nat having already found a chess board and men, and Job having run across a set of checkers.

There being but one board, Joe had marked out one upon the top of a chest, and while he and Chucks played draughts, both being good players, Frank and Nat were arrayed against each other in a game of chess, whilst Tom and Bob rattled the dominoes.

Then again they would sing, either some rattling sea song which they all knew, or one would sing a ballad or song alone and teach the rest the chorus, and the way those old bulwarks would ring some nights was enough to banish melancholy forever from the place.

So with one suggesting this, and another proposing that, and a third hinting that so and so would not be a bad idea, there was plenty of amusement, and discontent did not have the ghost of a chance for creeping in amongst them.

The library did not rest all this time, and there was plenty of mental improvement going on continually, for a mind is improved by being stocked with a variety of things, provided they are good, and there was variety enough in the ship's library to satisfy any one.

Christmas was approaching, and indeed by the time the boats were finished and supplied with masts, sails and oars, it was the 24th of December, and all hands set about celebrating the day in the good old-fashioned style, no matter if they were separated from all the world.

Christmas, 1869, came on a Saturday, as you will see by referring to your almanacs, and it was decided to give up both Saturday and Sunday to the celebration, so as to be sure to hit it, as Job remarked, being a little in doubt as to the correctness of his time.

"Will you hang up your stocking, Chucks, if I'll put something in it?" asked Frank, on the afternoon of the day before Christmas.

"It's most big enough to put yourself in," said Job, laughing, to Frank.

"H'm, he won't give me himself for a present. He likes Nat too much for that; I believe he's in love with him."

"Of course I am," retorted Frank, with a ringing laugh, "and I'm in love with you, too, Chucks, particularly when you make those nice little flapjacks," drawing the last four words out in a most comical manner, in imitation of the jolly cook and oarsman himself.

"I'll give you the best Christmas dinner you ever had, my boy; and do you know what I've found?"

"No, what is it—the North Pole? If you have, give it to Nat directly."

"No, I haven't, and we couldn't eat it if I had. I've found these boxes, hermetically sealed boxes, mind—of—"

"Well, what?" for Chucks had paused and was making the most comical faces, indicative of gustatory enjoyment, patting his fat stomach the while.

"You won't tell?"

"How can I, if I don't know?"

"Boned turkey! Think of that! We'll have a regular Christmas dinner after all, for you know I've got canned chicken, and I'll make a pie of it, and you know I can make a plum pudding, and you know we've got lots of fresh vegetables and soups, and all that, and preserves, and—"

"Hold on, my dear fellow, you make me hungry to talk so. You'll make us want to stay here always, and never try to find the Pole. You'll make us forget our homes and everything."

"No siree! I won't do that, for I am going home myself one of these days to see Mrs. Chucks and the—"

"Mrs. Chucks! Why, you don't mean to tell me you are married!"

"Yes, I am; and there's another one of the secrets of this frozen-up place."

"We shall thaw them all out by-and-by, and then there won't be any more left."

Such another Christmas celebration was certainly never had, we honestly believe, and the good old Saint Nicholas was doubtless as much pleased as he had ever been in his life, when he looked in upon

the merry-makers that Christmas Eve and saw how finely things were progressing.

The dinner designed, executed and superintended by Chucks, with considerable assistance from Frank, who worked with all a woman's deftness, was an entire and unequivocal success, and from the chicken soup to the plum pudding and black collee, was done full justice to.

"As the God of us all watches over us even in this desolate place," said Nat, "let us hope that the poor of the world are well provided for—this day, at least, and be thankful that, unlike many thousands of our fellow creatures in the great cities, we have at least a roof over our heads."

As an addition to the feast, being an extra occasion, Chucks proposed to bring out a bottle of some particularly fine wine, which he got a glimpse of a few days previous, and as no one objected, off he went, little expecting what he was destined to find.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AN UNEXPECTED FIND—HO! FOR THE NORTH POLE.

Away went Chucks to get the bottle of "particularly choice," taking the lantern with him, as that part of the hold where the wine was to be found was at a considerable depth and very dark.

Nat and the others sat sipping their coffee while he was gone, and in the excitement of agreeable conversation, they forgot all about Chucks and the wine, seeming to be unaware that he had gone fully half an hour, when five minutes ought to have sufficed for the commission of his errand.

At last Job seemed to become conscious of his mate's absence, and looking at the clock, remarked:

"Well, I'm blowed. Chucks ain't got back yet. Wonder if he has drank the whole bottle himself and ain't able to get here?"

"Oh, no, Chucks isn't that sort of a boy," said Nat; "but I say, how long has he been gone?"

"Two or three hours, I reckon," answered Job, with a laugh.

"Half an hour exactly," said Frank. "Perhaps he has fallen and hurt himself. Let's go and look for him."

They all arose to carry out the boy's suggestion, when at the very moment who should appear but Chucks himself, a bottle of wine in one hand and in the other a canvas bag.

This latter he threw upon the table with a thud and a chink that set all the glasses and dishes rattling.

"What have you got there, Chucks?" asked Nat, strangely interested.

"Open it; you're the captain, and you're the one what's got to show these fellows something, though I know what it is myself, as I couldn't help it, being on a tour of inspection."

"And you've kept us waiting all this time for our wine," said Frank.

"Well, I've fetched it, haven't I? Open the bag, Nat, and satisfy these fellows' curiosity."

There was a cord tied around the mouth of the bag, and this Nat unwound, and spreading aside the cloth, disclosed to the astonished eyes of all a mass of glittering gold coins.

He thrust his hand deep into the bag, and pulling it out, laid a pile of gold upon the table.

"This is a part of the ship's treasure," he said. "Don't you remember that the narrative I read spoke about its being concealed somewhere aboard? I really had forgotten all about it."

"So had I," said Chucks, "until I happened to kick one of the bags while looking for the wine. The chink it gave out set me to thinking, and I remembered what the log said."

"Did you find more than one bag?"

"Yes, but most of them were in chests, and while I was nosing about I forgot all about the wine, getting so interested in the gold. There's two or three chests, but I couldn't get into all of 'em—only one. This bag was wedged under a lot of stuff, and I had to pull 'em away."

"How did you happen to kick it, then?" asked Job.

"Part of it stuck out, and that's what I kicked. Well, after getting it out and seeing what it was, I forgot all about everything else and went to digging for gold, until at last, remembering what I came after, I tucked this first bag under one arm and the bottle of wine under the other, and so you met me."

"Let's drink to our success," said Nat, "and to-morrow we will overhaul the hull and see how much treasure there is. It will be as well to put it in a more convenient place, I think. The cabin, for instance."

"This is your gold, Nat," said Frank, "as it is your vessel. I wish you joy of it. Now let's finish our dinner in good style, and then we'll spend the evening as we should, in having the best time we know how."

Not one of this happy family was filled with the spirit of avarice upon seeing the gold, and knowing that there was more in the ship, for Nat reasoned that the money was left in trust to him to prosecute the search for the Pole, and the others argued that it was his, having been his father's, and that, therefore, they had no claim upon it.

Nat determined that if his intended expedition in the spring failed of its purpose, he would return, build or charter another vessel, using this money for the purpose, and, being provided with all modern appliances and conveniences, devote himself thoroughly to the noble work in which his father lost his life, and carry it out until assured of success or convinced that his task was, indeed, impossible of achievement.

Not so the villainous mate and his associates. They knew well that there was treasure aboard the Adventurer, and they determined to

possess it; not to carry out the same glorious purpose which animated Nat, but to enrich themselves.

Cartwright's chief motives were jealousy, hatred, and revenge, and every act of his was prompted by these feelings. He hated Nat because he was his father's son; he hated Frank because the boy's own true nature had prompted him to espouse Nat's cause; he hated the others because they knew of his infamous conduct both aboard the exploring vessel and the whaling bark, and hating them as he did, nothing would suffice but the defeat of their plans if not death to every one of the party.

He had been thwarted once by the determined action of the young hero and his mates, and the fact that Nat had rescued him from the hostile Esquimaux only went to increase his hatred.

Someone has written, and not altogether falsely, that if you want to make a man your foe do him a kindness. This is true of some natures, but to the credit of humanity be it said, not at all true in the majority of cases. With Cartwright, however, it was true; and though he had professed to be grateful for Nat's interference, it was only that he might get the young man in his power.

As agreed upon, a thorough search was made in the morning, and the treasure was found in its entirety, though considerable work was required before it could be removed to the cabin.

Captain Evans' motive in taking such a large amount of money with him—for Nat estimated that there was not less than sixty thousand dollars, and perhaps more—was not at all clear, but, at all events, here the money was, and it must be taken care of, to be used in the future.

It was put under lock and key, Nat first insisting that each of his companions should put a hundred dollars in his belt, and always keep it with him.

"We may be separated," he argued; "our plans may fail and our party be dispersed, therefore, if any one of you succeed in reaching civilized lands he will have the money to provide for his present wants."

A word concerning Cartwright and his chances for passing the winter in safety among these most desolate regions beyond the pall of civilization and utterly separated from the world, from congenial companions, and more than that, in a place where animal and vegetable life were wanting—land of never-ending snow.

The huts of the Esquimaux had been well built; he and his companions were well supplied with the means of keeping warm, with sufficient food, such as it was, to last them, and though their quarters were none of the best, safe from the piercing cold and icy blasts of the north.

The Esquimaux themselves had never been so far away from home as this, but safety now lay in remaining where they were, and as Cartwright had promised them an abundance of everything they could wish in the spring, they remained true to him.

His intention was to follow Nat to the Pole, if he went as far as that, and snatch the victory from him; then, returning to plunder the ship, and give the Esquimaux license to take whatever their fancy dictated.

This was his plan; we will see whether it would be successful or not.

We will pass over the dreary winter, the gradual approach of day, the month of twilight, and the final appearance of the sun above the horizon, after an absence of six months.

It was upon March 10, 1870, according to Job's calendar, that, their preparations having been all made, the boats, provisions, nautical instruments, clothing, weapons, and supplies of all kinds having been put upon the sledges, for here were the Esquimaux, agreeable to promise, ready to take them as far north as they wished to go; it was upon this tenth day of March, 1870, we repeat, that Nat, locking the cabin-door upon the outside, having made the proper arrangements, gave the word to start.

The Esquimaux had reported that many miles beyond the ice had begun to break, and that by the time they reached the limit of this singular hut, they would find no trouble in embarking upon the open sea, whence their path lay straight to the Pole.

"Friends," said Nat, "we are setting out upon a glorious journey. May success crown our efforts! Ho! for the North Pole!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

ON THE WAY—THE BOATS LAUNCHED.

OVER the ice and snow, speeding like the wind across the glittering expanse, went the sledges, whips cracking, dogs barking, Esquimaux shouting, and everybody in the highest spirits.

The ship is left behind, the silent sentinel still on guard, as he has been all these years, the snow and ice showing no signs of releasing from their firm grasp the proud vessel which once plowed the sea like a thing of life.

Away and away they go, and now the ship fades from sight, and the appearance of the scene changes like a dissolving picture in a magic lantern, not all at once, but gradually, until before one is aware, he is gazing at something totally different, and yet he knows not when the change took place.

The miles roll away behind them, now ten, then twenty, thirty, forty, up to fifty, and still they are scudding away over the ice, now making a detour, now dashing up a slope and then whirling down upon the other side, dogs barking, whips cracking, and men shouting as before.

Sixty, seventy, eighty miles, and still no limit to the belt of ice.

Is there no breaking up of this belt, or does it indeed reach clear to the Pole and beyond it, like a cap of ice covering the unfound extremity of the globe?

Where is the sea which Nat has been hoping for, and which the Esquimaux say they have seen? Is there none existing, or does this ice cover all things, never melting, never breaking, ever increasing?

A hundred miles have been rolled behind the swift sledges, and ten more on top of them, and now the guides say that they can smell the sea, can hear its roar, can see the drift ice, and feel a difference in the air, but Nat does not hear, see, feel, or smell anything but what he has already done for the last hundred miles; there is no difference to him.

"If it's going to be this way the whole journey," says Chucks, "what was the use of making the boats and going to all that trouble?"

"We don't know as it is," answered Nat. "We haven't gone half our journey yet. The sea is likely to open before us any day now."

"As long as it don't open under us, I don't mind," laughed Chucks, bound to have his joke; "but I must say that I would a plaguy sight rather be sailing in a boat than go scurrying over the ice this fashion. Suppose anything should break?"

Frequent halts were made, of course, during the journey, and it was during one of these, soon after Nat's remark, that he asked Job to take an observation, the sun being in good condition for that operation.

The sturdy harpooner did so, and after figuring a few moments, said:

"We're in north latitude, 87 degrees, 49 minutes, and west longitude about 69 degrees, 36 minutes, though I ain't so particular about that. It's the latitude I want."

"And the more the better," said Chucks; "the nearer you get to ninety the better."

"Perhaps we won't reach the sea on this parallel," said Nat. "Many explorers go up from the Pacific, but my father always insisted that the proper way was through Baffin's Bay, Smith's Sound, Kane Bay, Lincoln Sea, and so on, running as nearly on the seventieth parallel of west longitude as possible."

"That unlucky ice belt stopped him," remarked Job.

"Don't call it unlucky, for without it we should have never found our name, never have discovered what we have."

"And he never have died, mayhap," answered the harpooner. "Anyhow, I don't want to be grumpy; we're here, and have all the promise in the world of reaching our pint, an' whether by land or water it don't much matter, so long as we get there."

"You don't doubt that we will reach it, do you?" asked Nat, excitedly, for he was full of the glorious project.

"Not a bit of it. The only thing what troubles me is——"

"What?"

"Getting back."

"That hasn't got anything to do with it," said Chucks. "When Nat finds the Pole he's going to stay there—take possession in the name of the President of the United States, and found an independent colony."

"How's any one going to know it, then, my rosy Chucks?" asked Frank. "The world has got to be informed of this wonderful achievement."

"Start a submarine telegraph and tell 'em all about it, write the news on an iceberg and set it adrift or something like that. Anyhow, if he does start a colony, I'm to be cook."

"You shall be, I promise you," said Nat, with a laugh, in which they all joined.

Twenty miles more traversed, and then, to Nat's unspeakable delight, there began to be signs of a general breaking up of the ice, as though its limits had been reached and the sea must soon appear.

Deep fissures were met with, at the bottom of which, far below, could be heard the rush of waters, and at least these grew more frequent, and were not so deep; then channels were found between the floes, in which the water was quite deep and not unpleasantly cold.

Nat was terribly excited, but he managed to be externally cool and calm, giving orders with clearness and deliberation, and inspiring everyone with the enthusiasm he felt.

"We are coming to it," he said; "no one will deny now that there is a sea ahead of us, will they?"

No one did deny it, and certainly no one wanted to, and so the journey on sledges continued, though not so rapidly now as before, for the breaks in the ice were frequent.

The air was not nearly so cold as what they had been used to, and while not scudding along over the ice, mittens were not needed, the hands being sufficiently warm without.

Chucks outdid himself in the matter of cheerfulness, and they would not have known what to do without him, for no one could be sad or gloomy within anywhere near.

The streams running through the ice grew wider and wider and more numerous, and at last Nat proposed, as a measure of safety for the Esquimaux, that he and his companions launch their boats, and leave the natives to make their way to the mainland, which he was sure existed.

"This ice may possibly break up still more," he remarked, "and then our friends would be in a precarious condition."

"But ain't it all ice?" asked Bob.

"No, I fancy not. The chief tells me that over to the west where that black peak rises, there is land, and that he has seen the rocks, though no vegetation can be found anywhere about."

"Then let us get into our boats and set out," said Job, "an' as we can't take those fellers with us they can wait till we come back."

The preparations for the launch were at once begun, Nat explain-

to the Esquimaux that they were to wait for him and his comrades if expedient.

The boats were unpacked and put into shape, masts, thwarts and rudders were got into place, oars taken out and placed on the thwarts, ready for each man, provisions disposed in the safest corners, together with nautical instruments, all of which occupied considerable time.

Nat, Job and Frank got into the first boat, and Chucks, Tom and Bob into the other, which was about all they could conveniently hold, with the supplies and all, as there would be room needed for the rowers to sleep when they needed rest.

Nat had an American flag, found in the cabin lockers on the Adventurer, and this he was prepared to hoist as soon as the open water was reached.

The bold explorers used only their oars at first, the sails being furled, though ready to be set at any moment, and then, with a parting good-by to the Esquimaux, they dipped their blades and glided off towards that unknown goal, which braver hearts than theirs had vainly tried to reach, meeting only with bitter disappointment, untold hardship and death.

CHAPTER XXX.

NAT'S BLINDNESS—THE OPEN SEA—ANOTHER DISCOVERY BY CHUCKS.

EIGHT hours after the launching of the boats Nat sat in the stern sheets of the forward craft, steering, while Frank, wrapped in his great coat was fast asleep, Job seeming ready to follow his example.

The other boat was not far behind, Tom steering and Chucks pulling occasionally, more for the sake of keeping awake than of doing any particular good by rowing.

Nat's mind was full of great thoughts, and he steered mechanically, the current bearing him on without his having to make much of an effort towards guiding the boat.

He was wondering now, as he floated on in solemn silence, whether he should again meet the sinister Cartwright, and whether or not that man was to have an evil influence upon his destiny, as he had had upon his father's.

He could not drive the notion from his mind, no matter how he endeavored to think of other things, that the man was predestined, in some way or other, to be his evil genius, and that no matter how bright the prospect looked now, it was doomed to be darkened at the last by the evil-minded mate.

He could not define his fears, though they somehow seemed to center in Frank and himself, as if they were to be the chief objects of the man's hate and vengeance.

Try as he would, Nat could not shake off the feeling that his dangers were not over yet, and that, when he least expected, he would find the baleful presence of his enemy standing between him and fame, between him and honor, peace and happiness.

Presently Frank awoke with a start, and turning his liquid eyes upon Nat, brought the unpleasant subject of his thought more vividly to his mind by saying:

"Where is he? You have not seen him?"

"Whom, my lad?"

"That man; you know the one I mean."

"Cartwright? No, I have not seen him, Frank, my lad. Why should I?"

"I have."

"No, no, my boy, you have been dreaming."

"It did not seem so, and I fancied—no, I did see him; it was no fancy. He is going where we are, and there are Esquimaux with him, and all those wicked men that we saw before."

"I cannot stop his going there, if he wishes to do so."

"No, but he will try and stop you, try to snatch the prize from our hand; he has a larger party, and will not hesitate to use every ase means within his power."

"But we haven't met him yet," said Nat, trying to reason away his own fears as well as Frank's, though he said nothing of his own.

"Not yet, but we'll do so before many days. Beware of him, Nat, for I fear he may do you some harm. Be on your guard every moment that he is near."

"There, there, my lad," said Nat, reassuringly; "drop off to sleep again; you are tired, I know."

"Oh, I am quite rested now. I wonder how much further away the shores of our sea are?" he added, turning around, and looking forward.

As he did so he gave a great shout and caught Nat by the hand.

"Do you see that?" he cried, in the wildest excitement, pointing with his shapely, well-turned hand straight ahead.

"What is it, Frank? Not——"

"No, no, not him, not him, but something better than that—something we have been looking for. Can you not see it?"

"I see nothing."

"Oh, Heavens, you are blinded by this terrible glare, the ice blink as got into your eyes," said the lad, in wild excitement. "Tell me, Nat, dear Nat, can you not see before you the broad, glittering expanse of that open sea which you longed so much to gaze upon!"

"The sea!" cried Nat, bending forward. "Where is it?"

"Yonder! Look straight ahead; follow my hand; look with my eyes if yours fail. God knows I would give them to you if I could."

"The sea is there, is it, Frank?"

"Yes, yes; do you not behold it? For mercy's sake, do not tell me I am going mad."

"Wake Job, and ask him if he sees it."

Frank woke the harpooner, and asked him to tell what he saw of them.

Job looked earnestly in the direction pointed out, and then cried out loudly:

"You're right, Nat; there's your open sea glistening like a jewel. No ice, no nothing, only a broad, shining mass of water."

"You both see it?" asked Nat, with a strange sadness in his tones.

"Yes, to be sure we do. I heard Frank holler in my sleep, but thought I was dreaming."

"Then Heaven help me, for I see nothing but your faces. I am going blind."

Frank threw himself upon Nat's breast and wept bitterly, calling upon Heaven to take his sight and restore Nat's; to put any sacrifice upon him rather than Nat should suffer.

This was the first time that Frank had given way to such violent emotion, though they all knew that he was impulsive and quite unlike any other boys they had seen, both in his merry and his sad or serious moods, and they hastened to assist him in composing himself.

"Don't worry, lad; don't fret," said old Job, kindly. "Nat is all right; the blink won't last long. He's been looking straight ahead at the snow and ice so long and steady that it's blinded him for the time."

"You think he will recover?"

"I know he will."

"Thank Heaven! I would rather lose my own eyes than have him blinded."

"You think a good deal of me, my little Frank, don't you?" asked Nat, smiling.

Frank made answer by taking Nat's hand between both of his and looking into the latter's face with a deep, earnest, trustful gaze, the like of which Nat had never seen there before, and he was quite thrilled by it.

"I can see you, Frank, my good lad, he said, smiling, returning the pressure of those dainty hands, "though I cannot behold the sea you speak of. All is a blurred, confused mass ahead of me, though your faces and near objects are plain enough."

"I am glad the sea is there, Nat, for you always said you would find it."

"And I am glad that my little Frank was the first to see it and tell me of it. Next to discovering it myself, I would wish you to have that honor."

Nat's blindness was only temporary, and passed away after he had slept a few hours, and as he was careful after that to keep his eyes shaded, it did not return.

When he awoke he was both surprised and delighted to find that they were at last upon the open sea, which he had so often pictured in his imagination, the sails drawing well and the boat behaving as well as though she had run upon a mill pond.

The boats made a good five knots, the breeze being just right for craft of their size to send along in, and Nat's heart fairly danced as he thought of the glorious victory almost achieved, the prize almost won, the battle nearly finished.

Job took an observation upon the second day of their embarking fairly on the Polar Sea, and both he and Nat made their position out as in north latitude, 88 degrees and 30 minutes, or within one and one-half degrees of the Pole itself.

"Put that down," said Job, "that on the 29th day of March, 1870, we were within a hundred odd miles of the Pole."

"Hurrah for North Pole Nat!" shouted Chucks, whose enthusiasm was unbounded. "I knew he'd fetch it!"

"Hold on, Chucks," said Nat, "we haven't got it yet. You don't know what might happen yet."

"Well, if you don't find it, I don't expect any one will."

On the next day they reached the 89th degree of north latitude upon the 70th parallel of west longitude, and due record was made of the fact in the log book kept by Nat.

Soon after this record had been made, Chucks, who had all along, until recently, been noted as a discoverer, suddenly startled everyone by jumping up, clapping the telescope to his eye, and, after a pause, shouting out:

"Land—ho!"

The others gazed intently toward the point indicated, and Job, taking the glass, said, with an air of conviction: "He's right; there is land, and plenty of it."

CHAPTER XXXI.

ON LAND AGAIN—OLD ENEMIES—A DASTARDLY ACT.

CHUCKS had indeed made a remarkable discovery, and he was as proud as though he had found the Pole.

"Land ahead!" he shouted once more, and then sat down in the stern sheets looking most proud and happy, and rosier than ever.

The boats skimmed over the waves, which danced in the sunlight as merrily as waves ever danced, offering no resistance to the boats, but seeming to nudge them forward with all possible speed.

Nat ran the Stars and Stripes up to the top of the mast, and all hands gave a rousing cheer as the beautiful emblem fluttered for the first time over this unknown sea.

As the land came nearer it was seen to consist of black rocks, with here and there a patch of snow ice, and an occasional peak or mound higher than the surrounding coast.

As Job had said, it seemed to be of considerable extent, and they could not tell from the boats whether it was an island or a portion of one of the great continents.

Be that as it might, it was land, and would afford them a greater opportunity of ascertaining their exact position than an open expanse of sea would.

"Now, if we only had an engineer and surveyor with us," said Nat,

"we could lay out this land and make a map of it, to show to all the world our wonderful discovery."

"When you find the Pole you can climb to the top and get a good bird's eye view of it," laughed Chucks, "and then make a map from memory."

"If you don't stop making poor jokes, Chucks, I can't promise not to let those fat-drinking Inuits get hold of you," said Frank. "You really must consider our feelings, you know."

Away sped the boats under the impetus of the bellying sails and fresh breeze, the rocks growing plainer to the sight, a little cove presently appearing where a landing could be effected most satisfactorily, and to this Nat steered his craft, taking down his flag in order to wave it over this hitherto undiscovered continent or island, whatever it might be.

The boats shot into the little harbor, the sails were furled, the oars drawn in, and the little anchor or grapnels thrown out, and then our hero, with the flag in his hand, sprang from the bow of his boat into the shallow water, and rushing upon the rocks waved his starry banner proudly, and shouted in a loud voice:

"In the name of the United States of America I take possession of this Polar continent, and declare it to be government territory, now and forever!"

"Hurrah for North Pole Nat and the new discovery," said Chucks, springing after his bold young leader, and drawing the boats up to a little rocky shelf, where Nat assisted Frank to land, the boy allowing no one else to perform that service.

"Blast my buttons," roared the jolly oarsman. "I'll bet a pair of sealskin boots with copper toes that Frank's in love with Nat."

"Of course I am, you silly goose," laughed Frank, albeit the color of his handsome face vied with the cheeks of his tormentor in rosiness.

When all had landed, the boats were drawn up close to the rocks and a portion of the provisions, one keg of water, an extra coat or so, and the quadrant, were taken out.

Then the little crafts which had brought the daring adventurers to this solitary place were allowed to drift to the end of their warps, so that there should be no danger of their canvas sides scraping upon the sharp rocks.

The return voyage must be made, and therefore it was absolutely essential that no harm should come to their frail boats, which could not be replaced in case of loss.

The party next advanced into the interior, if it could be so called, coming before long to the mouth of a large cave whence flowed a wide and noisy stream of ice cold water.

Chucks dipped his hand in, but immediately drew it out, shaking and blowing his fingers, and performing a dance which would have been worthy of a whole tribe of the most savage and unregenerate Indians.

"What's the matter—is it hot?" inquired Tom.

"Hot? Yes, about as hot as ice can make it. Ugh! I believe the North Pole is right in the middle of that cave, and that it's a solid chunk of ice. Ugh! ain't it cold!"

There was no means of exploring the cave, and, therefore, the party scrambled over the rocks at its mouth, and climbed up a rather steep declivity, whence they expected to obtain a good general view of the lay of the land.

There were no traces of plants or animals of any kind, either in the present or the past, no bones, no fossil remains, no withered and dead stumps, absolutely nothing.

There seemed to be no soil, and, therefore, there could be no vegetation. The rocks were black and brittle, but whether of volcanic or glacial formation it was impossible to say.

"The place baffles me," said Nat, after thinking a long time. "I don't know whether anything has grown here, or whether it ever could; whether this rock is granite, limestone, feldspar, gneiss, or—"

"That's quite enough," said Chucks. "We don't want to have anything to do with the place except to locate your blasted Pole and then get out. I'm disgusted, that's what I am, and all out of breath."

They soon reached the top of the mound, where they had a pretty good view of their new possessions.

The coast line was very ragged, indented here and there with deep bays and cut by many foaming creeks, all of which seemed to diverge from some place under their feet, in the cave, Chucks said.

They could see the water stretching in all directions, but not entirely surrounding this land they had discovered, there being one point where it seemed to extend beyond the range of vision.

"I say," said Chucks, taking out a pocket compass, "what direction would you say that land was in?"

"South."

"If we're on the Pole it's all south," he answered, with a laugh; "how can it be anything else? Look at this needle, will you? It wants to stand on its head."

As Nat stepped towards Chucks to observe the phenomenon and see what might have caused it, Frank suddenly seized him by the hand and said, in a terribly excited whisper:

"Look there! There are other discoverers upon this land besides ourselves!"

Nat's sudden halt caused Chucks to start, and this made him slip, when, in attempting to regain his balance, he lost the compass, and it went rolling down the rocks, shattered to pieces.

Nat looked and saw that Frank was right, that there were other men upon these rocky shores besides themselves.

Three boats were seen floating in a little cove about half a mile off, and a party of men were landing, or had already done so.

"We're here fust, anyhow," said Bob. "By jinks, gimme the glass," and he took the telescope from Job's hand, saying, after a look:

"It's Cartwright and his gang, as sure's I'm a shiner!"

"I knew it!" said Nat. "I felt that we should meet again."

"Let us leave this place before they observe us," said Frank, and his suggestion they climbed down the rocks, and thus pursued their explorations unseen by their enemies.

An hour or so afterwards they suddenly emerged from a kind of rocky pass upon an elevated ledge or plateau, whence a good view of the sea could be obtained, and here they came face to face with Cartwright, Lewis, Jones, Rudd, and half a dozen Esquimaux.

"So-ho, you *have* got here, have you?" said the mate, with a sneer. "I thought to get here first, but your boats sail better than mine, though *they are not so strong!*"

He said those last words with such an emphasis that Nat was convinced he meant to do some damage to their boats, and he determined to go to them at once.

Saying nothing to Cartwright, he took Frank's hand, and turning short around, retraced his steps, followed by Job and the others.

Half an hour later they reached the cove where the boats had been left.

To their horror they discovered that a long gash had been made in the canvas bottom of one of them with a knife, and that the water had already half filled it.

"Whoever has done this cowardly, dastardly act," said Nat, passionately, "had better look to Heaven for protection, for as I live I will kill him at the first chance."

As he spoke the boat foundered, taking with it provisions, water, the only other quadrant they possessed, and other things of inestimable value in such a place.

"May the will of God be done," murmured Nat, as he buried his face in his hands, Frank trying vainly to comfort him.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE PUNISHMENT OF TREACHERY.

NAT succeeded in composing himself after a while, and then said calmly:

"What has happened cannot be helped now, so let us not complain. It is nearly noon, and I think we had better go to yonder light and take an observation. The ascertaining of our true position is now the one thing of importance."

Chucks said nothing, but patted the heavy barrel of his brass bomb gun in a way that was very suggestive, and bespoke little mercy to Cartwright, should the man meet him while still in that mood.

Leaving Tom to guard the other boat and give the alarm in case any attempt was made to destroy it, Nat proceeded in the direction of the light he had pointed out, followed by his comrades.

The distance was greater than he supposed, and when they halted upon the crest of a pile of black rocks, from which an almost uninterrupted view of the sea and this newly found continent could be obtained, they were pretty well tired out.

They sat down and rested for some time, chatting gayly the while, and never alluding to the dark side of the picture.

At last Nat arose and called to Job to bring him the quadrant, as he was ready to take an observation and determine their true position.

After adjusting the instrument and fixing the different sights in their proper position, Nat held it firmly to his eye and began his work.

When he had marked upon the dial at the side the correct figure, he began to work out the problem, saying excitedly:

"By Jove! If this isn't the North Pole itself, then I'm out. Let me see," and he rapidly worked the sum out in his head, crying at last:

"Yes, sir, it's just nine——"

A strange sound broke the stillness of that desolate place. Strange for that region, for doubtless it had never been heard there before.

The sound was the report of a pistol.

The bullet struck the instrument and knocked it, shattered, from Nat's hands, whence, falling upon the jagged rocks and bounding from point to point down the steep slope, it was literally broken to pieces.

For a moment Nat's grief at his irreparable loss was so great as to force him to silence, while the big tears ran down his face and his quivering lips showed the agony he felt.

This passed away in a moment and his face became deathly pale, his lips were drawn tightly over his teeth, his eyes flashed, his breath came and went in deep pulsations, his fingers twitched nervously, and his whole nature seemed hard and vengeful.

At last he broke the spell by crying out fiercely:

"There is but one man who would do such a fiendish act! Ah, there he is at this very moment, endeavoring to escape! Upon him, my men, and punish him as he deserves!"

Cartwright was seen dashing down the slope, followed by Jones, Lewis and the rest, and Nat at once gave chase.

Chucks threw his big gun to his shoulder, having previously put in a bomb, and a thundering report followed.

The swift messenger of death flew straight to its mark, and had not the treacherous mate slipped as he ran and fallen to the ground, the missile would have caused his death.

It passed over his head, however, and striking a rock, exploded, injuring Lewis seriously and hurting the others somewhat, the particles striking them in their faces.

Bob Carter was just ahead of Chucks when he discharged

up, and seeing that the shot had failed, seized the weapon and loaded it with the last bomb that the jolly oarsman possessed.

Then he strode rapidly forward, moving in a direction intended to head the villain off, his course being an oblique angle to that taken by Nat and his companions.

Cartwright had himself left his party, and they were about to scatter when Job came up with Jones and struck him to the earth with his fist.

Nat served Ned Lewis in the same manner, and seizing him by the throat, demanded:

"Tell me, you miserable cur, did your master fire that bullet, or not?"

"He did. He's had the pistol a long time, and has been saving it for this."

"The villain!"

"Who cut our boat?" demanded Job of Jones.

"I don't know."

"You liar!" said the harpooner, seizing the scoundrel by the throat, and shaking him. "You did it yourself. Take that!"

A stunning kick sent the man flying down the rocks in a most indignant heap, while a yell, as he reached the bottom, gave evidence of his bodily pain.

Suddenly a tremendous report was heard, and then a cry of agony so terrible that everyone was forced from very fear to hold his breath.

Nat and Job sprang forward, and as they reached the rocks around which Bob had disappeared, they saw a terrible sight.

The body of Cartwright, literally torn to pieces, lay upon the rocks, while close at hand Bob Carter was engaged in a desperate combat with Dick Rudd and two or three Esquimaux.

Dick Rudd had at that moment succeeded in breaking down Bob's guard, and, rushing in, had clinched with him, the gleam of a savage-looking knife being momentarily seen.

They were near the edge of a precipice, and before Nat could come to the assistance of the sailor, both he and his enemy had plunged headlong down the awful abyss, still clinging to each other with a deathly grasp.

A wild shriek arose upon the startled air as they left the edge of the precipice, and Nat's heart stood still at the sound.

He had heard more than that fearful cry, for blended with it had come an appeal for help in the well-known tones of Frank Trafton.

Nat turned and saw the lad struggling fiercely with the traitor Lewis, his slight frame being no match for the stalwart shipkeeper.

Frank had an ax, and he had already wounded the villain in several places, but his strength had begun to fail him, and it was at the moment that Nat turned that the man had overpowered him.

Nat saw the lad fall upon the sharp rocks, and then beheld Lewis detach a heavy mass from the rough boulders near him, and raise it threateningly over Frank's head.

"Oh, for a pistol!" thought the young man. "My God, the boy must not perish thus."

Though the distance was considerable, Nat cleared it in an incredibly short space of time, and dealt the monster a ringing blow upon the head just as the heavy mass was about to descend upon the unconscious boy at his feet.

"Coward!" cried Nat, enraged, "leave this place at once, or I will not answer for your safety."

The stone fell from the man's hands, but not upon Frank, and Lewis, stunned and dazed by the blow, staggered from the spot as if drunk.

"You'll pay me for this, you young scoundrel!" he at last managed to say between his clenched teeth.

"Get out of here, you miserable cur!" cried Nat, and with another kick, he sent Lewis reeling down the steep path.

Then he turned to Frank, the boy's pale face and bated breath giving him the greatest alarm.

With frenzied excitement he loosened the lad's coat in order to expose his throat and allow a better chance for the blood to circulate.

As he pulled open the boy's inner jacket and unloosed the collar of his shirt, he suddenly uttered a cry of surprise.

The boy Frank was no boy at all, but a woman.

At that instant Frank opened his eyes, and, seeing Nat, blushed like a rose.

He arose quickly to his feet, and turning away, arranged his disordered garments.

"You have discovered——"

"Fear not, Frank," said Nat, hastily, "your secret is safe."

"You have saved my life," said the other, turning to Nat and taking his hand. "You will still call me Frank?"

"Yes."

"And not ask me for my story yet?"

"Not until you wish it."

"When he I called father is no more, I will tell you all, and reveal another secret which I have tried, and almost in vain, to conceal."

"The man is already beyond our reach."

"Dead?"

Nat bowed his head, and poor Frank, overcome by conflicting emotions, fainted in Nat's arms.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FRANK'S OTHER SECRET REVEALED.

NAT was very much surprised to find that his dear little Frank was no boy, but a handsome girl, and he now recollected many occasions upon which the boy had acted strangely, but which were now all explained.

His blushing when Chucks accused him of being in love with Nat, his quiet ways, so different from those of a boy, his neat habits, his deftness in doing any household work upon the ship, his refined manners, all these were now made as plain as the day.

How he had told Chucks that he would never be any more of a man than he was then, his girlish face, his blushes, his modest demeanor, his fondness for Nat, which was deeper and truer than a mere boyish affection, all these things came to Nat's mind as he looked upon the pale face upturned to his, and, with a tenderness born of a feeling he had not thought to have existed, he spoke to Frank soothingly and caressingly, chafed her hands, and by other gentle means soon restored her to consciousness.

Frank had told Chucks that he loved Nat more than once, and now our hero felt that his liking for the lad, whose strange secret had been revealed, was more than a liking, it was a passion deep and strong, which nothing could overcome, and which in a moment exalted and enobled him a hundredfold.

"Who killed him?" asked Frank, as he revived.

"I don't know, though it must have been Bob. He had the gun. He is dead, too, poor fellow."

"And Job, and Chucks? Are they safe? Jolly old Chucks, I wouldn't have anything happen to him for all the world. He will have much to say when he knows my secret."

"Which you have kept so well guarded. I must say, Frank, that you seem a more charming boy than ever, now I know you are not."

"You do not love me any the less?"

"Any the less? No, indeed. But come, let us go to the shore and see to our other boat! We must not lose that, for then all hope is gone."

They soon reached the spot and found their friends just setting out to look for them.

During their absence, poor Tom had been attacked by the Esquimaux headed by Jones, who had escaped from Job.

The poor tar had defended himself and the boat most gallantly, and the miserable Jones had perished, a victim to his greed.

Tom had indeed driven the enemy off and had killed more than one, but he had himself received a mortal hurt, and was dead before Nat's return.

Whither the Esquimaux had gone was not known, nor if they had taken the remains of the dead villains, though no traces of either could be found, nor any sign of Ned Lewis.

"Let us haste away from this place," said Nat, "for my mind is not at ease, and I know not what may happen. We have no nautical instruments but one compass, and only one frail craft to bear us four away."

"But the Pole?" said Job, gravely.

"I give up the search, for the present, at all events. We will return to the ship, and perhaps in another season we can return under more auspicious circumstances."

The dead body of the faithful sailor was consigned to the silent depths of the untraversed sea, and then with a sigh Nat and his friends hoisted the sail and bore away from the shore.

"The Pole is there," said the young hero, "and I am confident that I have found it, but, alas, I have no proof to offer in support of my belief, and should I declare to the world that I have accomplished this hitherto impossible feat, I should receive only the world's derision for my trouble. Farewell, bright dream; in the future you may return, but now farewell."

The land gradually faded from sight, Nat laying his course for the point from which he had come, or as nearly so as possible.

During the first relief watch, Job taking the helm, a storm came up, the first they had met with since reaching this hitherto unknown sea.

The sun was obscured by heavy clouds, which made everything as black as night; the waves rose high, threatening to swamp them at every moment; the wind blew with such violence as to render taking in all sail absolutely necessary, and it was only by a miracle that they were not wrecked.

They were driven before the wind at a fearful rate, and though Nat saw that he must be entirely off his course, there was no help for it, as to attempt to head the boat in any other direction would have been their destruction.

For hours the tempest raged with the utmost violence, the tiny craft shooting over the waves like a thing of life, the four comrades doing little besides keeping her steady and occasionally bailing out the water which had been taken in over the sides.

After awhile they were enabled to hoist a jib and their mainsail with a double reef in it, and then they fairly flew over the foaming waters.

Nat never uttered a word of regret at having been cheated at the very moment of his triumph, never expressed a single feeling of disappointment, though his friends knew that it must have been a terrible blow to him, but remained perfectly calm and tranquil, now joking with Chucks, now chatting pleasantly with Frank, and anon asking advice from Job.

They all felt that the terrible death of the traitor, Cartwright, had been merited, but the subject was dismissed with few words, the sad fate of their own comrades and the uncertainty of their own lot affording them abundant food for reflection.

Of the boats formerly manned by the treacherous whites they saw nothing, nor of the Esquimaux, and never more did they set eyes upon them or their occupants, being left in doubt as to their fate.

Whether the shipkeeper escaped was never known, for from that day to the present Nat has never seen or heard of him in any way, so the conclusion was arrived at that he was dead, and as Nat never troubled himself about the man, let us dismiss him, once for all.

The situation of Nat and his friends was critical in the extreme, and from hour to hour they hoped only for present safety, having but little doubt of the end, but hoping always for the best, though they scarce dared think of being ultimately rescued.

They still had water and provisions, and, provided they met with no disaster, enough to last them for a considerable time, consequently they had no uneasiness upon that score.

Two or three days had passed and they were still upon the boundless ocean, though now they began to come in contact with drift ice, floating down into the warmer waters below the Arctic circle.

Nat had now given up all idea of reaching the Adventurer again, and when this idea was finally formed indisputably upon his mind, he said to his comrades:

"We have lost our dear old home, boys, and the silent sentinel upon the bowsprit will look in vain for our coming, as my poor father looked hopelessly for any relief from that world he had left forever."

"We passed many a happy hour there," said Frank, "and I shall always think of that time as one of the happiest periods of my existence."

Frank gave Nat such a grateful, loving, confiding look as he uttered these words that the latter could not but read that "other secret" which he had promised to reveal some day.

Frank indeed loved him, and would be his wife for the simple asking.

"Good-by, old ship," said Chucks; "you'll never have such a jolly cook again, I can tell you that. I'd give a pair of sealskin boots to look at the old ship once more."

"I was fond o' the good old ship for Nat's sake," said Job, "but I suppose we've seen her for the last time. Like's not she'll break up some winter, as maybe that ice belt will shift and crush her all up. It was a happy home, sure 'nough, and I hope I'll never have a worse one."

Through storm and tempest, sunshine and calm, the wanderers were wafted over the ocean, till one day, when their provisions and water had given out for many hours, their sails torn and soiled, their boat badly leaking and threatening to sink, they knew not how soon, the ever-jovial Chucks espied a sail.

A Norwegian whaler was out in his boats chasing whales, and the returned explorers were soon taken aboard the Bjorn and cared for with all the tenderness that sailors know how to show to distressed mariners.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

FRANK'S STORY—HOME AGAIN—CONCLUSION.

NAT and Frank stood upon the deck of an American vessel, returning home to the beloved land they had not seen in one whole year and more, and which at one time they thought they never would behold again.

Job and Chucks are upon the same vessel, but they are forward among the sailors at the present moment, Chucks telling some comical yarn and Job gravely listening.

It is Frank's face that is turned to Nat's, and which the bright moonlight illumines, but is this dainty maiden, clad in soft muslin and lace, with a wealth of rich brown hair floating over her well-rounded shoulders, the same person who, clad in furs and wearing occasionally a great white coat, was with them on the Adventurer, and whom Nat often spoke of as his dear little Frank?

Yes, it is the same, the young lady having resumed her proper attire, never to throw it off again, her secret having once been made known.

Chucks was "knocked all of a heap," as he expressed it, though at first he wanted to bet anybody a pair of sealskin boots that he had known Frank's true sex all along.

"I wasn't far wrong, anyhow, was I?" he chuckled, "when I said you loved Nat? I knew that much, anyhow."

"I love you too, you dear old Chucks," Frank said, with a laugh, "but not as much as Nat."

"Of course not, for now you'll be Mrs. Nat, I suppose, and I couldn't think of having a Mrs. Chucks No. 2 while No. 1 was still alive."

Frank blushed and laughed, but did not deny the charge; and I mean to tell my reader just here, in confidence, mind! that she has been Mrs. Nat for the past ten years.

However, we must return to the ship, which is bearing our friends home after their many exciting adventures and deadly perils.

Thanks to Nat's foresight in having them all provide themselves with money before leaving the Adventurer for the last time, they were by no means penniless when they at last set foot once more upon shore, the Bjorn returning at the end of September.

Nat found an American vessel about to sail for Boston, and finding the captain, he told his story, and offered to pay for his passage home.

This the honest-hearted tar would not consent to, and Nat and Frank were at once installed in the cabin, the captain taking to them at once, and being intensely interested in the recital of their adventures.

"Nat," says Frank, this beautiful evening, "I promised once to tell you several things which seemed inexplicable to you."

"Yes, my dear, you did; but you need be in no hurry about it."

"First about the Esquimaux bringing me back after they had carried me away."

"That *did* puzzle me, I must own, for these fellows are not in the habit of doing things in that way."

"The secret is just this: When they discovered that I was a woman, for I soon made them understand it, they ceased their cruel treatment of me, and behaved as if I were a goddess.

"They could not do enough to please me then, for they said there had been a white woman once who had been good to them, they could never forget her.

"For her sake they swore to do everything in their power to make me happy, and they treated me with unusual kindness; though I do have queer ways of showing it."

Here Frank laughed such a soft and silvery laugh that Nat forced to join in; it was so infectious. He remembered the awkward ways of certain good-natured Inuits he had seen, and he was obliged to laugh at the remembrance.

"I had a fancy that this white woman was Lady Franklin," repeated Frank; "though, of course, I had no means of ascertaining. What I told them that I wanted to be taken back to the ship they consented to, and that's how I came back. I could not tell you then, because my secret to keep."

"Cartwright must have been as careful as you, for he never gave me the slightest inkling of the real state of the case."

"Do you know why? For years I have been a boy to all the world. There were two of us children, I and my brother Frank, but Frank died some five or six years ago.

"Cartwright gave out that it was Charlotte who died, and as we were exactly alike, no one knew me from Frank, particularly when I assumed the habit of a youth.

"We moved to a distance and I was called Frank, and was supposed to be a boy by everyone. This is the reason: Frank was to receive the legacy of an enormous amount upon the death of some relative of Cartwright's. I was Frank, consequently I would have the money."

"I was forced to keep up the delusion, though it was hateful to me, and, as I tell you, for years I have been unsexed. This wicked man so filled my mind with hatred of you and yours that I was forced to consent to his plan of being avenged upon you.

"I was brought aboard the Arctic Fox as cabin boy, which you know, and was bade to watch my opportunity to slay you in every way, and thus clear off an old score.

"I did not then know the extent of the man's wickedness, nor the depth of his deceit, and in my anguish and fear of him I promised to do whatever he wished, believing you to be a monster and undeserving of pity.

"Love for you conquered the fear I had for him, and at last I came to regard him with horror. He would not hesitate to take life if it could advance his interests thereby, and I knew that he and Job had a plan to either kill or abandon the captain, and seize the vessel."

"You were to be sacrificed at the same time, and then we were to return and live in ease. I so hated the wretch that I avoided him as much as possible, and when I got into your boat upon that last day of our stay on the Fox, it was so I might not be with him.

"I knew when Tom told us of the abandonment that he and Job had had it planned beforehand, for I saw them whispering together just before we lowered, but did not think much of it at the time.

"You could not know then how thankful I was that I had been with you in the boat, although our lives were in such peril, for I loved you with all my heart, and yet could not tell it.

"I feared you would think me bold and reproach me for being a child of that man, but by little and little I knew you were too good for that. And yet I was still obliged to keep my secret."

"While you believed me a lad I could be near you at all times to assist you with what strength I had, and be a beloved companion to you. Once you knew me to be what I was, I feared that you would be embarrassed—would think me a burden; perhaps not love me as I loved the 'dear little Frank,' and so I still kept my secret."

"You know now that you were mistaken, do you not?" For answer she turns her face to his and gives him a look full of tenderness and devotion, such as any man might feel proud to be bestowed upon him.

The story of North Pole Nat is finished, and but a few lines remain to be written.

Whether the silent sentinel of the Adventurer still keeps his ceaseless vigil no one knows, and very likely no one ever will know, for Nat has given up his ambition of finding the northern limit of this, our globe.

That he may have discovered the Pole he firmly believes, but as his logs were destroyed, and as no record was made of his position at the time when Cartwright snatched the prize from his hand, he knows very well that he cannot prove his assertion, and never mentions the incident, feeling sure that he will never live to see accomplished that which he so bravely strove for.

Established in a good business, with a loving wife and a group of merry children to make home pleasant, he cares no more to roam over the world, but remains just where he settled, after his return to busy New York.

Job is a harpooner still, and will be until he dies, but he has had of the Arctic ocean he wants, and always ships upon vessels bound for the Pacific or Indian oceans.

Mr. and Mrs. Chucks are as happy as two such jolly souls could be expected, the partner of the rosy fellow's joys being as merry as himself.

Chucks is getting too rotund to go as a sailor now, and he has settled down as a ship chandler, at which business he makes a tidy income, which he says is for his only son, a fine, manly fellow, though somewhat inclined to obesity, whom he has named Nat. Frank Chucks—Nat's wife is still called Frank and nothing else—his old-time messmate and constant friend, NORTH POLE NAT.

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